GEORGIAN POETRY

1913-1915

John and Mimi

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE object of *Georgian Poetry* 1911–1912 was to give a convenient survey of the work published within two years by some poets of the newer generation. The book was welcomed; and perhaps, even in a time like this, those whom it interested may care to have a corresponding volume for the three years which have since passed.

Two of the poets—I think the youngest, and certainly not the least gifted—are dead. Rupert Brooke, who seemed to have everything that is worth having, died last April in the service of his country. James Elroy Flecker, to whom life and death were less generous, died in January after a long and disabling illness.

A few of the contributors to the former volume are not represented in this one, either because they have published nothing which comes within its scope, or because they belong in fact to an earlier poetic generation, and their inclusion must be allowed to have been an anachronism. Two names are added.

The alphabetical arrangement of the writers has been modified in order to recognize the honour which Mr Gordon Bottomley has done to the book by allowing his play to be first published here.

My thanks for permission to print the poems are due to Messrs Constable, Duckworth, Heinemann, Herbert Jenkins, Macmillan, Elkin Mathews, Methuen, Martin Secker, and Sidgwick and Jackson; and to the Editors of *Country Life*, the *English Review*, *Flying Fame*, *New Numbers*, the *New Statesman*, and the *Westminster Gazette*.

E. M.

Oct. 1915.

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GORDON BOTTOMLEY

KING LEAR'S WIFE
(To T. S. M.)

Gordon Bottomley

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

LEAR, King of Britain.
HYGD, his Queen.
GONERIL, daughter to King Lear.
CORDEIL, daughter to King Lear.
GORMFLAITH, waiting-woman to Queen Hygd.
MERRYN, waiting-woman to Queen Hygd.
A PHYSICIAN.
TWO ELDERLY WOMEN.

KING LEAR'S WIFE.

The scene is a bedchamber in a one-storied house. The walls consist of a few courses of huge irregular boulders roughly squared and fitted together; a thatched roof rises steeply from the back wall. In the centre of the back wall is a doorway opening on a garden and covered by two leather curtains; the chamber is partially hung with similar hangings stitched with bright wools. There is a small window on each side of this door.

Toward the front a bed stands with its head against the right wall; it has thin leather curtains hung by thongs and drawn back. Farther forward a rich robe and a crown hang on a peg in the same wall. There is a second door beyond the bed, and between this and the bed's head stands a small table with a bronze lamp and a bronze cup on it. Queen HYGD, an emaciated woman, is asleep in the bed; her plenteous black hair, veined with silver, spreads over the pillow. Her waiting-woman, MERRYN, middle-aged and hard-

featured, sits watching her in a chair on the farther side of the bed. The light of early morning fills the room.

Merryn

Many, many must die who long to live,
Yet this one cannot die who longs to die:
Even her sleep, come now at last, thwarts death,
Although sleep lures us all half way to death. . . .
I could not sit beside her every night
If I believed that I might suffer so:
I am sure I am not made to be diseased,
I feel there is no malady can touch me—
Save the red cancer, growing where it will.

[*Taking her beads from her girdle, she kneels at the foot of the bed.*

O sweet Saint Cleer, and sweet Saint Elid too,
Shield me from rooting cancers and from madness:
Shield me from sudden death, worse than two death-beds;
Let me not lie like this unwanted queen,
Yet let my time come not ere I am ready—
Grant space enow to relish the watchers' tears
And give my clothes away and calm my features
And streek my limbs according to my will,
Not the hard will of fumbling corpse-washers.

[*She prays silently.*

KING LEAR, a great, golden-bearded man in the full maturity of life, enters abruptly by the door beyond the bed, followed by the PHYSICIAN.

Lear

Why are you here? Are you here for ever?
Where is the young Scotswoman? Where is she?

Merryn
O, Sire, move softly; the Queen sleeps at last.

Lear (*continuing in an undertone*)
Where is the young Scotswoman? Where is Gormflaith?
It is her watch. . . . I know; I have marked your hours.
Did the Queen send her away? Did the Queen
Bid you stay near her in her hate of Gormflaith?
You work upon her yeasting brain to think
That she's not safe except when you crouch near her
To spy with your dropt eyes and soundless presence.

Merryn
Sire, midnight should have ended Gormflaith's watch,
But Gormflaith had another kind of will
And ended at a godlier hour by slumber,
A letter in her hand, the night-lamp out.
She loitered in the hall when she should sleep.
My duty has two hours ere she returns.

Lear
The Queen should have young women about her bed,
Fresh cool-breathed women to lie down at her side
And plenish her with vigour; for sick or wasted women
Can draw a virtue from such abounding presence,
When night makes life unwary and looses the strings of being,
Even by the breath, and most of all by sleep.
Her slumber was then no fault: go you and find her.

Physician

It is not strange that a bought watcher drowses;
What is most strange is that the Queen sleeps
Who would not sleep for all my draughts of sleep
In the last days. When did this change appear?

Merryn

We shall not know—it came while Gormflaith nodded.
When I awoke her and she saw the Queen
She could not speak for fear:
When the rekindling lamp showed certainly
The bed-clothes stirring about our lady's neck,
She knew there was no death, she breathed, she said
She had not slept until her mistress slept
And lulled her; but I asked her how her mistress
Slept, and her utterance faded.
She should be blamed with rods, as I was blamed
For slumber, after a day and a night of watching,
By the Queen's child-bed, twenty years ago.

Lear

She does what she must do: let her alone.
I know her watch is now: get gone and send her.

[*MERRYN goes out by the door beyond the bed.*

Is it a portent now to sleep at night?
What change is here? What see you in the Queen?
Can you discern how this disease will end?

Physician

Surmise might spring and healing follow yet,
If I could find a trouble that could heal;

But these strong inward pains that keep her ebbing
Have not their source in perishing flesh.
I have seen women creep into their beds
And sink with this blind pain because they nursed
Some bitterness or burden in the mind
That drew the life, sucklings too long at breast.
Do you know such a cause in this poor lady?

Gordon Bottomley

Lear

There is no cause. How should there be a cause?

Physician

We cannot die wholly against our wills;
And in the texture of women I have found
Harder determination than in men:
The body grows impatient of enduring,
The harried mind is from the body estranged,
And we consent to go: by the Queen's touch,
The way she moves—or does not move—in bed,
The eyes so cold and keen in her white mask,
I know she has consented.
The snarling look of a mute wounded hawk,
That would be let alone, is always hers—
Yet she was sorely tender: it may be
Some wound in her affection will not heal.
We should be careful—the mind can so be hurt
That nought can make it be unhurt again.
Where, then, did her affection most persist?

Lear

Old bone-patcher, old digger in men's flesh,
Doctors are ever itching to be priests,
Meddling in conduct, natures, life's privacies.

Gordon Bottomley

We have been coupled now for twenty years,
And she has never turned from me an hour—
She knows a woman's duty and a queen's:
Whose, then, can her affection be but mine?
How can I hurt her—she is still my queen?
If her strong inward pain is a real pain
Find me some certain drug to medicine it:
When common beings have decayed past help,
There must be still some drug for a king to use;
For nothing ought to be denied to kings.

Physician

For the mere anguish there is such a potion.
The gum of warpy juniper shoots is seethed
With the torn marrow of an adder's spine;
An unflawed emerald is pashed to dust
And mingled there; that broth must cool in moonlight.
I have indeed attempted this already,
But the poor emeralds I could extort
From wry-mouthed earls' women had no force.
In two more dawns it will be late for potions. . . .
There are not many emeralds in Britain,
And there is none for vividness and strength
Like the great stone that hangs upon your breast:
If you will waste it for her she shall be holpen.

Lear (*with rising voice*)

Shatter my emerald? My emerald? My emerald?
A High King of Eire gave it to his daughter
Who mothered generations of us, the kings of Britain;
It has a spiritual influence; its heart
Burns when it sees the sun. . . . Shatter my emerald!

Only the fungused brain and carious mouth
Of senile things could shape such thought. . . .
My emerald!

HYGD stirs uneasily in her sleep.

Physician
Speak lower, low; for your good fame, speak low—
If she should waken thus. . . .

Lear
There is no wise man
Believes that medicine is in a jewel.
It is enough that you have failed with one.
Seek you a common stone. I'll not do it.
Let her eat heartily: she is spent with fasting.
Let her stand up and walk: she is so still
Her blood can never nourish her. Come away.

Physician
I must not leave her ere the woman comes—
Or will some other woman. . . .

Lear
No, no, no, no;
The Queen is not herself; she speaks without sense;
Only Merryn and Gormflaith understand.
She is better quiet. Come. . . .
[*He urges the PHYSICIAN roughly away by the shoulder.*
My emerald!
[*He follows the PHYSICIAN out by the door at the back. Queen HYGD awakes at his last noisy words as he disappears.*

Hygd
I have not slept; I did but close mine eyes

Gordon Bottomley

A little while—a little while forgetting. . . .
Where are you, Merryn? . . . Ah, it is not Merryn. . . .
Bring me the cup of whey, woman; I thirst. . . .
Will you speak to me if I say your name?
Will you not listen, Gormflaith? . . . Can you hear?
I am very thirsty—let me drink. . . .
Ah, wicked woman, why did I speak to you?
I will not be your suppliant again. . . .
Where are you? O, where are you? . . . Where are you?

[*She tries to raise herself to look about the room, but sinks back helplessly.*

The curtains of the door at the back are parted, and GONERIL *appears in hunting dress,—her kirtle caught up in her girdle, a light spear over her shoulder—stands there a moment, then enters noiselessly and approaches the bed. She is a girl just turning to womanhood, proud in her poise, swift and cold, an almost gleaming presence, a virgin huntress.*

Goneril

Mother, were you calling?
Have I awakened you?
They said that you were sleeping.
Why are you left alone, mother, my dear one?

Hygd

Who are you? No, no, no! Stand farther off!
You pulse and glow; you are too vital; your presence hurts. . . .
Freshness of hill-swards, wind and trodden ling,

I should have known that Goneril stands here. Gordon Bottomley
It is yet dawn, but you have been afoot
Afar and long: where could you climb so soon?

Goneril
Dearest, I am an evil daughter to you:
I never thought of you—O, never once—
Until I heard a moor-bird cry like you.
I am wicked, rapt in joys of breath and life,
And I must force myself to think of you.
I leave you to caretakers' cold gentleness;
But O, I did not think that they dare leave you.
What woman should be here?

Hygd I have forgot. . . .
I know not. . . . She will be about some duty.
I do not matter: my time is done . . . nigh done . . .
Bought hands can well prepare me for a grave,
And all the generations must serve youth.
My girls shall live untroubled while they may,
And learn happiness once while yet blind men
Have injured not their freedom;
For women are not meant for happiness.
Where have you been, my falcon?

Goneril
I dreamt that I was swimming, shoulder up,
And drave the bed-clothes spreading to the floor:
Coldness awoke me; through the waning darkness
I heard far hounds give shivering aëry tongue,
Remote, withdrawing, suddenly faint and near;
I leapt and saw a pack of stretching weasels
Hunt a pale coney in a soundless rush,
Their elfin and thin yelping pierced my heart

Gordon Bottomley

As with an unseen beauty long awaited;
Wolf-skin and cloak I buckled over this night-gear,
And took my honoured spear from my bed-side
Where none but I may touch its purity,
And sped as lightly down the dewy bank
As any mothy owl that hunts quick mice.
They went crying, crying, but I lost them
Before I stept, with the first tips of light,
On Raven Crag near by the Druid Stones;
So I paused there and, stooping, pressed my hand
Against the stony bed of the clear stream;
Then entered I the circle and raised up
My shining hand in cold stern adoration
Even as the first great gleam went up the sky.

Hygd

Ay, you do well to worship on that height:
Life is free to the quick up in the wind,
And the wind bares you for a god's descent—
For wind is a spirit immediate and aged.
And you do well to worship harsh men-gods,
God Wind and Those who built his Stones with him:
All gods are cruel, bitter, and to be bribed,
But women-gods are mean and cunning as well.
That fierce old virgin, Cornish Merryn, prays
To a young woman, yes and even a virgin—
The poorest kind of woman—and she says
That is to be a Christian: avoid then
Her worship most, for men hate such denials,
And any woman scorns her unwed daughter.
Where sped you from that height? Did Regan join you there?

Goneril

Does Regan worship anywhere at dawn?

The sweaty half-clad cook-maids render lard
Out in the scullery, after pig-killing,
And Règan sidles among their greasy skirts,
Smeary and hot as they, for craps to suck.
I lost my thoughts before the giant Stones . . .
And when anew the earth assembled round me
I swung out on the heath and woke a hare
And speared it at a cast and shouldered it,
Startled another drinking at a tarn
And speared it ere it leapt; so steady and clear
Had the god in his fastness made my mind.
Then, as I took those dead things in my hands,
I felt shame light my face from deep within,
And loathing and contempt shake in my bowels,
That such unclean coarse blows from me had issued
To crush delicate things to bloody mash
And blemish their fur when I would only kill.
My gladness left me; I careered no more
Upon the morning; I went down from there
With empty hands:
But under the first trees and without thought
I stole on conies at play and stooped at one;
I hunted it, I caught it up to me
As I outsprang it, and with this thin knife
Pierced it from eye to eye; and it was dead,
Untorn, unsullied, and with flawless fur.
Then my untroubled mind came back to me.

Hygd

Leap down the glades with a fawn's ignorance;
Live you your fill of a harsh purity;
Be wild and calm and lonely while you may.
These are your nature's joys, and it is human
Only to recognise our natures' joys
When we are losing them for ever.

Goneril But why
Do you say this to me with a sore heart?
You are a queen, and speak from the top of life,
And when you choose to wish for others' joys
Those others must have woe.

Hygd
The hour comes for you to turn to a man
And give yourself with the high heart of youth
More lavishly than a queen gives anything.
But when a woman gives herself
She must give herself for ever and have faith;
For woman is a thing of a season of years,
She is an early fruit that will not keep,
She can be drained and as a husk survive
To hope for reverence for what has been;
While man renews himself into old age,
And gives himself according to his need,
And women more unborn than his next child
May take him yet with youth
And lose him with their potence.

Goneril
But women need not wed these men.

Hygd
We are good human currency, like gold,
For men to pass among them when they choose.

[*A child's hands beat on the outside of the door beyond the bed.*

Cordeil's Voice (*a child's voice, outside*)
Father. . . . Father. . . . Father. . . . Are you here?
Merryn, ugly Merryn, let me in. . . .

I know my father is here. . . . I want him. . . . Now. . . .
Mother, chide Merryn, she is old and slow. . . .

Hygd (*softly*)
My little curse. Send her away—away. . . .

Cordeil's Voice
Father. . . . O, father, father. . . . I want my father.

Goneril (*opening the door a little way*)
Hush; hush—you hurt your mother with your voice.
You cannot come in, Cordeil; you must go away:
Your father is not here. . . .

Cordeil's Voice He must be here:
He is not in his chamber or the hall,
He is not in the stable or with Gormflaith:
He promised I should ride with him at dawn
And sit before his saddle and hold his hawk,
And ride with him and ride to the heron-marsh;
He said that he would give me the first heron,
And hang the longest feathers in my hair.

Goneril
Then you must haste to find him;
He may be riding now. . . .

Cordeil's Voice
But Gerda said she saw him enter here.

Goneril
Indeed, he is not here. . . .

Cordeil's Voice Let me look. . . .

Goneril
You are too noisy. Must I make you go?

Cordeil's Voice
Mother, Goneril is unkind to me.

Hygd (*raising herself in bed excitedly, and speaking so vehemently that her utterance strangles itself*)
Go, go, thou evil child, thou ill-comer.

[*GONERIL, with a sudden strong movement, shuts the resisting door and holds it rigidly. The little hands beat on it madly for a moment, then the child's voice is heard in a retreating wail.*

Goneril
Though she is wilful, obeying only the King,
She is a very little child, mother,
To be so bitterly thought of.

Hygd
Because a woman gives herself for ever
Cordeil the useless had to be conceived
(Like an after-thought that deceives nobody)
To keep her father from another woman.
And I lie here.

Goneril (*after a silence*)
Hard and unjust my father has been to me;
Yet that has knitted up within my mind
A love of coldness and a love of him
Who makes me firm, wary, swift and secret,
Until I feel if I become a mother

I shall at need be cruel to my children, Gordon
And ever cold, to string their natures harder Bottomley
And make them able to endure men's deeds;
But now I wonder if injustice
Keeps house with baseness, taught by kinship—
I never thought a king could be untrue,
I never thought my father was unclean. . . .
O mother, mother, what is it? Is this dying?

Hygd
I think I am only faint. . . .
Give me the cup of whey. . . .

[*GONERIL takes the cup and, supporting HYGD, lets her drink.*

Goneril
There is too little here. When was it made

Hygd
Yester-eve. . . . Yester-morn. . . .

Goneril Unhappy mother,
You have no daughter to take thought for you—
No servant's love to shame a daughter with,
Though I am shamed—you must have other food,
Straightway I bring you meat. . . .

Hygd It is no use. . . .
Plenish the cup for me. . . . Not now, not now,
But in a while; for I am heavy now. . . .
Old Wynoc's potions loiter in my veins,
And tides of heaviness pour over me
Each time I wake and think. I could sleep now.

Gordon Bottomley

Goneril

Then I shall lull you, as you once lulled me.

[*Seating herself on the bed, she sings.*

The owlets in roof-holes
Can sing for themselves;
The smallest brown squirrel
Both scampers and delves;
But a baby does nothing—
She never knows how—
She must hark to her mother
Who sings to her now.
Sleep then, ladykin, peeping so;
Hide your handies and ley lei lo.

[*She bends over HYGD and kisses her; they laugh softly together. LEAR parts the curtains of the door at the back, stands there a moment, then goes away noiselessly.*

The lish baby otter
Is sleeky and streaming,
With catching bright fishes
Ere babies learn dreaming;
But no wet little otter
Is ever so warm
As the fleecy-wrapt baby
'Twixt me and my arm.
Sleep big mousie. . . .

Hygd (*suddenly irritable*)

Be quiet. . . . I cannot bear it.

[*She turns her head away from GONERIL and closes her eyes.*

As GONERIL watches her in silence GORMFLAITH enters by the door beyond the bed. She is young and tall and

fresh-coloured; her red hair coils and crisps close to her little head, showing its shape. Her movements are soft and unhurried; her manner is quiet and ingratiating and a little too agreeable; she speaks a little too gently.

Goneril (*meeting her near the door and speaking in a low voice*)
Why did you leave the Queen? Where have you been?
Why have you so neglected this grave duty?

Gormflaith
This is the instant of my duty, Princess:
From midnight until now was Merryn's watch.
I thought to find her here : is she not here?

[*HYGD turns to look at the speakers; then, turning back, closes her eyes again and lies as if asleep.*

Goneril
I found the Queen alone. I heard her cry your name.

Gormflaith
Your anger is not too great, Madam; I grieve
That one so old as Merryn should act thus—
So old and trusted and favoured, and so callous.

Goneril
The Queen has had no food since yester-night.

Gormflaith
Madam, that is too monstrous to conceive:
I will seek food. I will prepare it now.

Gordon Bottomley

Goneril

Stay here: and know, if the Queen is left again,
You shall be beaten with two rods at once.

[*She picks up the cup and goes out by the door beyond the bed.*

GORMFLAITH turns the chair a little away from the bed so that she can watch the far door, and, seating herself, draws a letter from her bosom.

Gormflaith (*to herself, reading*)

" Open your window when the moon is dead,
And I will come again.
The men say everywhere that you are faithless,
The women say your face is a false face
And your eyes shifty eyes. Ah, but I love you,
Gormflaith.
Do not forget your window-latch to-night,
For when the moon is dead the house is still."

[*LEAR again parts the door-curtains at the back, and, seeing GORMFLAITH, enters. At the first slight rustle of the curtains GORMFLAITH stealthily slips the letter back into her bosom before turning gradually, a finger to her lips, to see who approaches her.*

Lear (*leaning over the side of her chair*)

Lady, what do you read?

Gormflaith

I read a letter, Sire.

Lear

A letter—a letter—what read you in a letter?

Gormflaith (*taking another letter from her girdle*)
Your words to me—my lonely joy your words. . . .
" If you are steady and true as your gaze "—

Lear (*tearing the letter from her, crumpling it, and flinging it to the back of the room*)
Pest!
You should not carry a king's letters about,
Nor hoard a king's letters.

Gormflaith No, Sire.

Lear
Must the King also stand in the presence now?

Gormflaith (*rising*)
Pardon my troubled mind; you have taken my letter from me.

[*LEAR seats himself and takes GORMFLAITH'S hand.*

Gormflaith
Wait, wait—I might be seen. The Queen may waken yet.

[*Stepping lightly to the bed, she noiselessly slips the curtain on that side as far forward as it will come. Then she returns to LEAR, who draws her to him and seats her on his knee.*

Lear
You have been long in coming:
Was Merryn long in finding you?

Gormflaith (*playing with Lear's emerald*)
Did Merryn. . . .
Has Merryn been. . . . She loitered long before she came,

Gordon Bottomley

For I was at the women's bathing-place ere dawn. . . .
No jewel in all the land excites me and enthralls
Like this strong source of light that lives upon your breast.

Lear (*taking the jewel chain from his neck and slipping it over Gormflaith's head while she still holds the emerald*)

Wear it within your breast to fill the gentle place
That cherished the poor letter lately torn from you.

Gormflaith

Did Merryn at your bidding, then, forsake her Queen?

[*LEAR nods.*

You must not, ah, you must not do these masterful things,
Even to grasp a precious meeting for us two;
For the reproach and chiding are so hard to me,
And even you can never fight the silent women
In hidden league against me, all this house of women.
Merryn has left her Queen in unwatched loneliness,
And yet your daughter Princess Goneril has said
(With lips that scarce held back the spittle for my face)
That if the Queen is left again I shall be whipt.

Lear

Children speak of the punishments they know.
Her back is now not half so white as yours,
And you shall write your will upon it yet.

Gormflaith

Ah, no, my King, my faithful. . Ah, no. . no . .
The Princess Goneril is right; she judges me:
A sinful woman cannot steadily gaze reply
To the cool, baffling looks of virgin untried force.
She stands beside that crumbling mother in her hate,
And, though we know so well—she and I, O we know—
That she could love no mother nor partake in anguish,
Yet she is flouted when the King forsakes her dam,
She must protect her very flesh, her tenderer flesh,
Although she cannot wince; she's wild in her cold brain,
And soon I must be made to pay a cruel price
For this one gloomy joy in my uncherished life.
Envy and greed are watching me aloof
(Yes, now none of the women will walk with me),
Longing to see me ruined, but she'll do it. . . .
It is a lonely thing to love a king. . . .

[*She puts her cheek gradually closer and close to LEAR'S cheek as she speaks: at length he kisses her suddenly and vehemently, as if he would grasp her lips with his: she receives it passively, her head thrown back, her eyes closed.*

Lear

Goldilocks, when the crown is couching in your hair
And those two mingled golds brighten each other's wonder,
You shall produce a son from flesh unused—

Gordon Bottomley

Virgin I chose you for that, first crops are strongest—
A tawny fox with your high-stepping action,
With your untiring power and glittering eyes,
To hold my lands together when I am done,
To keep my lands from crumbling into mouthfuls
For the short jaws of my three mewling vixens.
Hatch for me such a youngster from my seed,
And I and he shall rein my hot-breathed wenches
To let you grind the edges off their teeth.

Gormflaith (*shaking her head sadly*)

Life holds no more than this for me; this is my hour.
When she is dead I know you'll buy another Queen—
Giving a county for her, gaining a duchy with her—
And put me to wet nursing, leashing me with the thralls.
It will not be unbearable—I've had your love.
Master and friend, grant then this hour to me:
Never again, maybe, can we two sit
At love together, unwatched, unknown of all,
In the Queen's chamber, near the Queen's crown
And with no conscious Queen to hold it from us:
Now let me wear the Queen's true crown on me
And snatch a breathless knowledge of the feeling
Of what it would have been to sit by you
Always and closely, equal and exalted,
To be my light when life is dark again.

Lear

Girl, by the black stone god, I did not think
You had the nature of a chambermaid,

Who pries and fumbles in her lady's clothes
With her red hands, or on her soily neck
Stealthily hangs her lady's jewels or pearls.
You shall be tiring-maid to the next queen
And try her crown on every day o' your life
In secrecy, if that is your desire:
If you would be a queen, cleanse yourself quickly
Of menial fingering and servile thought.

Gormflaith
You need not crown me. Let me put it on
As briefly as a gleam of Winter sun.
I will not even warm it with my hair.

Lear
You cannot have the nature of a queen
If you believe that there are things above you :
Crowns make no queens, queens are the cause of crowns.

Gormflaith (*slipping from his knee*)
Then I will take one. Look.

[*She tip-toes lightly round the front of the bed to where the crown hangs on the wall.*

Lear
Come here, mad thing—come back!
Your shadow will wake the Queen.

Gormflaith
Hush, hush! That angry voice
Will surely wake the Queen.

[*She lifts the crown from the peg, and returns with it.*

Gordon Bottomley

Lear

Go back; bear back the crown:
Hang up the crown again.
We are not helpless serfs
To think things are forbidden
And steal them for our joy.

Gormflaith

Hush, hush! It is too late;
I dare not go again.

Lear

Put down the crown: your hands are base hands yet.
Give it to me: it issues from my hands.

Gormflaith (*seating herself on his knee again, and crowning herself*)

Let anger keep your eyes steady and bright
To be my guiding mirror: do not move.
You have received two queens within your eyes.

[*She laughs clearly, like a bird's sudden song. HYGD awakes and, after an instant's bewilderment, turns her head toward the sound; finding the bed-curtain dropt, she moves it aside a little with her fingers; she watches LEAR and GORMFLAITH for a short time, then the curtain slips from her weak grasp and she lies motionless.*

Lear (*continuing meanwhile*)

Doff it. . . . (*GORMFLAITH kisses him.*)
Enough . . . . (*Kiss*) Unless you do. . . .
(*Kiss*) my will. . . . (*Kiss*)
I shall. . . . (*Kiss*) I shall. . . . (*Kiss*) I'll have you
. . . . (*Kiss*) sent. . . . (*Kiss*) to. . . . (*Kiss.*)

Gormflaith Hush.

Lear
Come to the garden: you shall hear me there.

Gormflaith
I dare not leave the Queen. . . . Yes, yes, I come.

Lear
No, you are better here: the guard would see you.

Gormflaith
Not when we reach the pathway near the apple-yard.
[*They rise.*

Lear
Girl, you are changed: you yield more beauty so.
[*They go out hand in hand by the doorway at the back. As they pass the crumpled letter GORMFLAITH drops her handkerchief on it, then picks up handkerchief and letter together and thrusts them into her bosom as she passes out.*

Hygd (*fingering back the bed-curtain again*)
How have they vanished? What are they doing now?

Gormflaith (*singing outside*)
If you have a mind to kiss me
You shall kiss me in the dark:
Yet rehearse, or you might miss me—
Make my mouth your noontide mark.

Gordon Bottomley

See, I prim and pout it so;
Now take aim and. . . . No, no, no!
Shut your eyes, or you'll not learn
Where the darkness soon shall hide me:
If you will not, then, in turn,
I'll shut mine. Come, have you spied me?

[*GORMFLAITH'S voice grows fainter as the song closes.*

Hygd

Does he remember love-ways used with me?
Shall I never know? Is it too near?
I'll watch him at his wooing once again,
Though I peer up at him across my grave-sill.

[*She gets out of bed and takes several steps toward the garden doorway; she totters and sways, then, turning, stumbles back to the bed for support.*

Limbs, will you die? It is not yet the time.
I know more discipline: I'll make you go.

[*She fumbles along the bed to the head, then, clinging against the wall, drags herself toward the back of the room.*

It is too far. I cannot see the wall.
I will go ten more steps: only ten more.
One. Two. Three. Four. Five.
Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten.
Sundown is soon to-day: it is cold and dark.
Now ten steps more, and much will have been done.
One. Two. Three. Four. Ten.
Eleven. Twelve. Sixteen. Nineteen. Twenty.
Twenty-one. Twenty-three. Twenty-eight. Thirty. Thirty-one.

At last the turn. Thirty-six. Thirty-nine. Forty.
Now only once again. Two. Three.
What do the voices say? I hear too many.
The door: but here there is no garden. . . . Ah!

[*She holds herself up an instant by the door-curtains; then she reels and falls, her body in the room, her head and shoulders beyond the curtains.*

GONERIL enters by the door beyond the bed, carrying the filled cup carefully in both hands.

Goneril

Where are you? What have you done? Speak to me.

[*Turning and seeing HYGD, she lets the cup fall and leaps to the open door by the bed.*

Merryn, hither, hither. . . . Mother, O mother!

[*She goes to HYGD. MERRYN enters.*

Merryn

Princess, what has she done? Who has left her?
She must have been alone.

Goneril Where is Gormflaith?

Merryn

Mercy o' mercies, everybody asks me
For Gormflaith, then for Gormflaith, then for Gormflaith,
And I ask everybody else for her;
But she is nowhere, and the King will foam.
Send me no more; I am old with running about
After a bodiless name.

Goneril She has been here,
And she has left the Queen. This is her deed.

Merryn
Ah, cruel, cruel! The shame, the pity—

Goneril Lift.
[*Together they raise HYGD, and carry her to bed.*
She breathes, but something flitters under her flesh:
Wynoc the leech must help us now. Go, run,
Seek him, and come back quickly, and do not dare
To come without him.

Merryn It is useless, lady:
There's fever at the cowherd's in the marsh,
And Wynoc broods above it twice a day,
And I have lately seen him hobble thither.

Goneril
I never heard such scornful wickedness
As that a king's physician so should choose
To watch and even heal base men and poor—
And, more than all, when there's a queen a-dying. . . .

Hygd (*recovering consciousness*)
Whence come you, dearest daughter? What have I done?
Are you a dream? I thought I was alone.
Have you been hunting on the Windy Height?
Your hands are not thus gentle after hunting.
Or have I heard you singing through my sleep?
Stay with me now: I have had piercing thoughts

Of what the ways of life will do to you
To mould and maim you, and I have a power
To bring these to expression that I knew not.
Why do you wear my crown? Why do you wear
My crown I say? Why do you wear my crown?
I am falling, falling! Lift me: hold me up.

[*GONERIL climbs on the bed and supports HYGD against her shoulder.*

It is the bed that breaks, for still I sink.
Grip harder: I am slipping!

Goneril Woman, help!

[*MERRYN hurries round to the front of the bed and supports HYGD on her other side. HYGD points at the far corner of the room.*

Hygd

Why is the King's mother standing there?
She should not wear her crown before me now.
Send her away, she had a savage mind.
Will you not hang a shawl across the corner
So that she cannot stare at me again?

[*With a rending sob she buries her face in GONERIL'S bosom.*

Ah, she is coming! Do not let her touch me!
Brave splendid daughter, how easily you save me:
But soon will Gormflaith come, she stays for ever.
O, will she bring my crown to me once more?
Yes, Gormflaith, yes. . . . Daughter, pay Gormflaith well.

Goneril

Gormflaith has left you lonely:
'Tis Gormflaith who shall pay.

Hygd

No, Gormflaith; Gormflaith. . . . Not my loneliness. . . .
Everything. . . . Pay Gormflaith. . . .

[*Her head falls back over GONERIL'S shoulder and she dies.*

Goneril (*laying Hygd down in bed again*)

Send horsemen to the marshes for the leech,
And let them bind him on a horse's back
And bring him swiftlier than an old man rides.

Merryn

This is no leech's work: she's a dead woman.
I'd best be finding if the wisdom-women
Have come from Brita's child-bed to their drinking
By the cook's fire, for soon she'll be past handling.

Goneril

This is not death: death could not be like this.
She is quite warm—though nothing moves in her.
I did not know death could come all at once:
If life is so ill-seated no one is safe.
Cannot we leave her like herself awhile?
Wait awhile, Merryn. . . . No, no, no; not yet!

Merryn

Child, she is gone and will not come again
However we cover our faces and pretend
She will be there if we uncover them.
I must be hasty, or she'll be as stiff
As a straw mattress is.

[*She hurries out by the door near the bed.*

Goneril (*throwing the whole length of her body along Hygd's body, and embracing it*)

Come back, come back; the things I have not done
Beat in upon my brain from every side:
I know not where to put myself to bear them:
If I could have you now I could act well.
My inward life, deeds that you have not known,
I burn to tell you in a sudden dread
That now your ghost discovers them in me.
Hearken, mother; between us there's a bond
Of flesh and essence closer than love can cause:
It cannot be unknit so soon as this,
And you must know my touch,
And you shall yield a sign.
Feel, feel this urging throb: I call to you. . . .

[*GORMFLAITH, still crowned, enters by the garden doorway.*

Gormflaith

Come back! Help me and shield me!

[*She disappears through the curtains.*

GONERIL has sprung to her feet at the first sound of GORMFLAITH'S voice.

LEAR enters through the garden doorway, leading GORMFLAITH by the hand.

Lear What is to do?

Goneril (*advancing to meet them with a deep obeisance*)

O, Sir, the Queen is dead: long live the Queen.
You have been ready with the coronation.

Lear

What do you mean? Young madam, will you mock?

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Goneril

But is not she your choice?
The old Queen thought so, for I found her here,
Lipping the prints of her supplanter's feet,
Prostrate in homage, on her face, silent.
I tremble within to have seen her fallen down.
I must be pardoned if I scorn your ways:
You cannot know this feeling that I know,
You are not of her kin or house; but I
Share blood with her, and, though she grew too worn
To be your Queen, she was my mother, Sir.

Gormflaith

The Queen has seen me.

Lear

She is safe in bed.

Goneril

Do not speak low: your voice sounds guilty so;
And there is no more need—she will not wake.

Lear

She cannot sleep for ever. When she wakes
I will announce my purpose in the need
Of Britain for a prince to follow me,
And tell her that she is to be deposed. . . .
What have you done? She is not breathing now.
She breathed here lately. Is she truly dead?

Goneril

Your graceful consort steals from us too soon:
Will you not tell her that she should remain—
If she can trust the faith you keep with a queen?

[*She steps to GORMFLAITH, who is*

sidling toward the garden door-way, and, taking her hand, leads her to the foot of the bed.

Lady, why will you go? The King intends
That you shall soon be royal, and thereby
Admitted to our breed: then stay with us
In this domestic privacy to mourn
The grief here fallen on our family.
Kneel now; I yield the eldest daughter's place.
Why do you fumble in your bosom so?
Put your cold hands together; close your eyes,
In inward isolation to assemble
Your memories of the dead, your prayers for her.

[*She turns to LEAR, who has approached the bed and drawn back the curtain.*

What utterance of doom would the king use
Upon a watchman in the castle garth
Who left his gate and let an enemy in?
The watcher by the Queen thus left her station:
The sick bruised Queen is dead of that neglect.
And what should be the doom on a seducer
Who drew that sentinel from his fixt watch?

Lear

She had long been dying, and she would have died
Had all her dutiful daughters tended her bed.

Goneril

Yes, she had long been dying in her heart.
She lived to see you give her crown away;
She died to see you fondle a menial:
These blows you dealt now, but what elder wounds
Received them to such purpose suddenly?

Gordon Bottomley

What had you caused her to remember most?
What things would she be like to babble over
In the wild helpless hour when fitful life
No more can choose what thoughts it shall encourage
In the tost mind? She has suffered you twice over,
Your animal thoughts and hungry powers, this day,
Until I knew you unkingly and untrue.

Lear

Punishment once taught you daughterly silence;
It shall be tried again. . . . What has she said?

Goneril

You cannot touch me now I know your nature:
Your force upon my mind was only terrible
When I believed you a cruel flawless man.
Ruler of lands and dreaded judge of men,
Now you have done a murder with your mind
Can you see any murderer put to death?
Can you—

Lear What has she said?

Goneril

Continue in your joy of punishing evil,
Your passion of just revenge upon wrong-doers,
Unkingly and untrue?

Lear Enough: what do you know?

Goneril

That which could add a further agony
To the last agony, the daily poison

Of her late, withering life; but never word
Of fairer hours or any lost delight.
Have you no memory, either, of her youth,
While she was still to use, spoil, forsake,
That maims your new contentment with a longing
For what is gone and will not come again?

Lear

I did not know that she could die to-day.
She had a bloodless beauty that cheated me:
She was not born for wedlock. She shut me out.
She is no colder now. . . . I'll hear no more.
You shall be answered afterward for this.
Put something over her: get her buried:
I will not look on her again.

[*He breaks from GONERIL and flings abruptly out by the door near the bed.*

Gormflaith

My king, you leave me!

Goneril Soon we follow him:
But, ah, poor fragile beauty, you cannot rise
While this grave burden weights your drooping head.

[*Laying her hand caressingly on GORMFLAITH'S neck, she gradually forces her head farther and farther down.*

You were not nurtured to sustain a crown,
Your unanointed parents could not breed
The spirit that ten hundred years must ripen.
Lo, how you sink and fail.

Gormflaith You had best take care,
For where my neck has bruises yours shall have wounds.

Gordon Bottomley

The King knows of your wolfish snapping at me:
He will protect me.

Goneril

Ay, if he is in time.

Gormflaith (*taking off the crown and holding it up blindly toward Goneril with one hand*)

Take it and let me go!

Goneril

Nay, not to me:
You are the Queen's, to serve her even in death.
Yield her her own. Approach her: do not fear;
She will not chide you or forgive you now.
Go on your knees; the crown still holds you down.

[*GORMFLAITH stumbles forward on her knees and lays the crown on the bed, then crouches motionlessly against the bedside.*

Goneril (*taking the crown and putting it on the dead Queen's head*)

Mother and Queen, to you this holiest circlet
Returns, by you renews its purpose and pride;
Though it is sullied with a menial warmth,
Your august coldness shall rehallow it,
And when the young lewd blood that lent it heat
Is also cooler we can well forget.

[*She steps to GORMFLAITH.*

Rise. Come, for here there is no more to do,
And let us seek your chamber, if you will,
There to confer in greater privacy;
For we have now interment to prepare.

[*She leads GORMFLAITH to the door near the bed.*

You must walk first, you are still the Queen elect.

[*When GORMFLAITH has passed before her GONERIL unsheathes her hunting knife.*

Gormflaith (*turning in the doorway*)
What will you do?

Goneril (*thrusting her forward with the haft of the knife*)
On. On. On. Go in.

[*She follows GORMFLAITH out.*

After a moment's interval two elderly women, one a little younger than the other, enter by the same door: they wear black hoods and shapeless black gowns with large sleeves that flap like the wings of ungainly birds: between them they carry a heavy cauldron of hot water.

The Younger Woman
We were listening. We were listening.

The Elder Woman We were both listening.

The Younger Woman
Did she struggle?

The Elder Woman She could not struggle long.

[*They set down the cauldron at the foot of the bed.*

The Elder Woman (*curtseying to the Queen's body*)
Saving your presence, Madam, we are come

Gordon Bottomley

To make you sweeter than you'll be hereafter,
And then be done with you.

The Younger Woman (*curtseying in turn*)

Three days together, my Lady, y'have had me ducked
For easing a foolish maid at the wrong time;
But now your breath is stopped and you are colder,
And you shall be as wet as a drowned rat
Ere I have done with you.

The Elder Woman (*fumbling in the folds of the robe that hangs on the wall*)

Her pocket is empty; Merryn has been here first.
Hearken, and then begin:
You have not touched a royal corpse before,
But I have stretched a king and an old queen,
A king's aunt and a king's brother too,
Without much boasting of a still-born princess;
So that I know, as a priest knows his prayers,
All that is written in the chamberlain's book
About the handling of exalted corpses,
Stripping them and trussing them for the grave:
And there it says that the chief corpse-washer
Shall take for her own use by sacred right
The coverlid, the upper sheet, the mattress
Of any bed in which a queen has died,
And the last robe of state the body wore;
While humbler helpers may divide among them
The under sheet, the pillow, and the bed-gown
Stript from the cooling queen.
Be thankful, then, and praise me every day
That I have brought no other women with me
To spoil you of your share.

The Younger Woman Gordon Bottomley

Ah, you have always been a friend to me:
Many's the time I have said I did not know
How I could even have lived but for your kindness.

[*The ELDER WOMAN draws down the bedclothes from the Queen's body, loosens them from the bed, and throws them on the floor.*

The Elder Woman

Pull her feet straight: is your mind wandering?

[*She commences to fold the bedclothes, singing as she moves about.*

A louse crept out of my lady's shift—
Ahumm, Ahumm, Ahee—
Crying " Oi! Oi! We are turned adrift;
The lady's bosom is cold and stiffed,
And her arm-pit's cold for me."

[*While the ELDER WOMAN sings, the YOUNGER WOMAN straightens the Queen's feet and ties them together, draws the pillow from under her head, gathers her hair in one hand and knots it roughly; then she loosens her nightgown, revealing a jewel hung on a cord round the Queen's neck.*

The Elder Woman (*running to the vacant side of the bed*)

What have you there? Give it to me.

The Younger Woman It is mine:

I found it.

The Elder Woman Leave it.

The Younger Woman Let go.

The Elder Woman Leave it, I say.
Will you not? Will you not? An eye for a jewel, then!

[*She attacks the face of the YOUNGER WOMAN with her disengaged hand.*

The Younger Woman (*starting back*)
Oh!

[*The ELDER WOMAN breaks the cord and thrusts the jewel into her pocket.*

The Younger Woman
Aie! Aie! Aie! Old thief! You are always thieving!
You stole a necklace on your wedding day:
You could not bear a child, you stole your daughter:
You stole a shroud the morn your husband died:
Last week you stole the Princess Regan's comb . .

[*She stumbles into the chair by the bed, and, throwing her loose sleeves over her head, rocks herself and moans.*

The Elder Woman (*resuming her clothes-folding and her song*)
" The lady's linen's no longer neat; "—
Ahumm, Ahumm, Ahee—
" Her savour is neither warm nor sweet;
It's close for two in a winding sheet,
And lice are too good for worms to eat;
So here's no place for me."

[*GONERIL enters by the door near the*

bed: her knife and the hand that holds it are bloody. She pauses a moment irresolutely.

The Elder Woman
Still work for old Hrogneda, little Princess?

[*GONERIL goes straight to the cauldron, passing the women as if they were not there: she kneels and washes her knife and her hand in it. The women retire to the back of the chamber.*

Goneril (*speaking to herself*)
The way is easy: and it is to be used.
How could this need have been conceived slowly?
In a keen mind it should have leapt and burnt:
What I have done would have been better done
When my sad mother lived and could feel joy.
This striking without thought is better than hunting;
She showed more terror than an animal,
She was more shiftless. . . .
A little blood is lightly washed away,
A common stain that need not be remembered;
And a hot spasm of rightness quickly born
Can guide me to kill justly and shall guide.

[*LEAR enters by the door near the bed.*

Lear
Goneril, Gormflaith, Gormflaith. . . . Have you seen Gormflaith?

Goneril
I led her to her chamber lately, Sir.

Gordon Bottomley

Lear
Ay, she is in her chamber. She is there.

Goneril
Have you been there already? Could you not wait?

Lear
Daughter, she is bleeding: she is slain.

Goneril (*rising from the cauldron with dripping hands*)
Yes, she is slain: I did it with a knife:
And in this water is dissolved her blood,
(*Raising her arms and sprinkling the Queen's body*)
That now I scatter on the Queen of death
For signal to her spirit that I can slake
Her long corrosion of misery with such balm—
Blood for weeping, terror for woe, death for death,
A broken body for a broken heart.
What will you say against me and my deed?

Lear
That now you cannot save yourself from me.
While your blind virgin power still stood apart
In an unused, unviolated life,
You judged me in my weakness, and because
I felt you unflawed I could not answer you;
But you have mingled in mortality
And violently begun the common life
By fault against your fellows; and the state,
The state of Britain that inheres in me
Not touched by my humanity or sin,
Passions or privy acts, shall be as hard
And savage to you as to a murderess.

Goneril (*taking a letter from her girdle*)
I found a warrant in her favoured bosom, King:
She wore this on her heart when you were crowning her.

Lear
But this is not my hand:
(*Looking about him on the floor*)
Where is the other letter?

Goneril
Is there another letter? What should it say?

Lear
There is no other letter if you have none.
(*Reading*)
" Open your window when the moon is dead,
And I will come again.
The men say everywhere that you are faithless. . . .
And your eyes shifty eyes. Ah, but I love you, Gormflaith." . . .
This is not hers: she'd not receive such words.

Goneril
Her name stands twice therein: her perfume fills it:
My knife went through it ere I found it on her.

Lear
The filth is suitably dead. You are my true daughter.

Goneril
I do not understand how men can govern,

Gordon Bottomley

Use craft and exercise the duty of cunning,
Anticipate treason, treachery meet with treachery,
And yet believe a woman because she looks
Straight in their eyes with mournful, trustful gaze,
And lisps like innocence, all gentleness.
Your Gormflaith could not answer a woman's eyes.
I did not need to read her in a letter;
I am not woman yet, but I can feel
What untruths are instinctive in my kind,
And how some men desire deceit from us.
Come; let these washers do what they must do:
Or shall your Queen be wrapped and coffined awry?

[*She goes out by the garden doorway.*

Lear

I thought she had been broken long ago:
She must be wedded and broken, I cannot do it.

[*He follows GONERIL out.*
The two women return to the bedside.

The Elder Woman

Poor, masterful King, he is no easier,
Although his tearful wife is gone at last:
A wilful girl shall prick and thwart him now.
Old gossip, we must hasten; the Queen is setting.
Lend me a pair of pennies to weight her eyes.

The Younger Woman

Find your own pennies: then you can steal them safely.

Praise you the gods of Britain, as I do praise them,
That I have been sweet-natured from my birth,
And that I lack your unforgiving mind.
Friend of the worms, help me to lift her clear
And draw away the under sheet for you;
Then go and spread the shroud by the hall fire—
I never could put damp linen on a corpse.

[*She sings.*

The louse made off unhappy and wet;—
Ahumm, Ahumm, Ahee—
He's looking for us, the little pet;
So haste, for her chin's to tie up yet,
And let us be gone with what we can get—
Her ring for thee, her gown for Bet,
Her pocket turned out for me.

CURTAIN.

RUPERT BROOKE

TIARE TAHITI

Rupert Brooke

Mamua, when our laughter ends,
And hearts and bodies, brown as white,
Are dust about the doors of friends,
Or scent ablowing down the night,
Then, oh! then, the wise agree,
Comes our immortality.
Mamua, there waits a land
Hard for us to understand.
Out of time, beyond the sun,
All are one in Paradise,
You and Pupure are one,
And Taü, and the ungainly wise.
There the Eternals are, and there
The Good, the Lovely, and the True,
And Types, whose earthly copies were
The foolish broken things we knew;
There is the Face, whose ghosts we are;
The real, the never-setting Star;
And the Flower, of which we love
Faint and fading shadows here;
Never a tear, but only Grief;
Dance, but not the limbs that move;
Songs in Song shall disappear;
Instead of lovers, Love shall be;
For hearts, Immutability;
And there, on the Ideal Reef,
Thunders the Everlasting Sea!

And my laughter, and my pain,
Shall home to the Eternal Brain ;
And all lovely things, they say,
Meet in Loveliness again;
Miri's laugh, Teïpo's feet,

And the hands of Matua,
Stars and sunlight there shall meet,
Coral's hues and rainbows there,
And Teüra's braided hair;
And with the starred *tiare's* white,
And white birds in the dark ravine,
And *flamboyants* ablaze at night,
And jewels, and evening's after-green,
And dawns of pearl and gold and red,
Mamua, your lovelier head!
And there'll no more be one who dreams
Under the ferns, of crumbling stuff,
Eyes of illusion, mouth that seems,
All time-entangled human love.
And you'll no longer swing and sway
Divinely down the scented shade,
Where feet to Ambulation fade,
And moons are lost in endless Day.
How shall we wind these wreaths of ours,
Where there are neither heads nor flowers?
Oh, Heaven's Heaven!—but we'll be missing
The palms, and sunlight, and the south;
And there's an end, I think, of kissing,
When our mouths are one with Mouth. . . .

Taü here, Mamua,
Crown the hair, and come away!
Hear the calling of the moon,
And the whispering scents that stray
About the idle warm lagoon.
Hasten, hand in human hand,
Down the dark, the flowered way,
Along the whiteness of the sand,
And in the water's soft caress,
Wash the mind of foolishness,

Mamua, until the day. Rupert
Spend the glittering moonlight there Brooke
Pursuing down the soundless deep
Limbs that gleam and shadowy hair,
Or floating lazy, half-asleep.
Dive and double and follow after,
Snare in flowers, and kiss, and call,
With lips that fade, and human laughter,
And faces individual,
Well this side of Paradise! . . .
There's little comfort in the wise.

Rupert Brooke

THE GREAT LOVER

I have been so great a lover: filled my days
So proudly with the splendour of Love's praise,
The pain, the calm, and the astonishment,
Desire illimitable, and still content,
And all dear names men use, to cheat despair,
For the perplexed and viewless streams that bear
Our hearts at random down the dark of life.
Now, ere the unthinking silence on that strife
Steals down, I would cheat drowsy Death so far,
My night shall be remembered for a star
That outshone all the suns of all men's days.
Shall I not crown them with immortal praise
Whom I have loved, who have given me, dared with me
High secrets, and in darkness knelt to see
The inenarrable godhead of delight?
Love is a flame;—we have beaconed the world's night.
A city:—and we have built it, these and I.
An emperor:—we have taught the world to die.
So, for their sakes I loved, ere I go hence,
And the high cause of Love's magnificence,
And to keep loyalties young, I'll write those names
Golden for ever, eagles, crying flames,
And set them as a banner, that men may know,
To dare the generations, burn, and blow
Out on the wind of Time, shining and streaming. . . .

These I have loved:
White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,
Ringed with blue lines; and feathery, faery dust;
Wet roofs, beneath the lamp-light; the strong crust
Of friendly bread; and many-tasting food;
Rainbows; and the blue bitter smoke of wood;
And radiant raindrops couching in cool flowers;

And flowers themselves, that sway through sunny hours,
Dreaming of moths that drink them under the moon;
Then, the cool kindliness of sheets, that soon
Smooth away trouble; and the rough male kiss
Of blankets; grainy wood; live hair that is
Shining and free; blue-massing clouds; the keen
Unpassioned beauty of a great machine;
The benison of hot water; furs to touch;
The good smell of old clothes; and other such—
The comfortable smell of friendly fingers,
Hair's fragrance, and the musty reek that lingers
About dead leaves and last year's ferns. . . .
Dear names,
And thousand other throng to me! Royal flames;
Sweet water's dimpling laugh from tap or spring;
Holes in the ground; and voices that do sing;
Voices in laughter, too; and body's pain,
Soon turned to peace; and the deep-panting train;
Firm sands; the little dulling edge of foam
That browns and dwindles as the wave goes home;
And washen stones, gay for an hour; the cold
Graveness of iron; moist black earthen mould;
Sleep; and high places; footprints in the dew;
And oaks; and brown horse-chestnuts, glossy-new;
And new-peeled sticks; and shining pools on grass;—
All these have been my loves. And these shall pass,
Whatever passes not, in the great hour,
Nor all my passion, all my prayers, have power
To hold them with me through the gate of Death.
They'll play deserter, turn with the traitor breath,
Break the high bond we made, and sell Love's trust
And sacramented covenant to the dust.
—Oh, never a doubt but, somewhere, I shall wake,
And give what's left of love again, and make

Rupert Brooke

New friends, now strangers. . . .
But the best I've known,
Stays here, and changes, breaks, grows old, is blown
About the winds of the world, and fades from brains
Of living men, and dies.
Nothing remains.

O dear my loves, O faithless, once again
This one last gift I give: that after men
Shall know, and later lovers, far-removed,
Praise you, 'All these were lovely'; say, 'He loved.'

BEAUTY AND BEAUTY

Rupert Brooke

When Beauty and Beauty meet
  All naked, fair to fair,
The earth is crying-sweet,
  And scattering-bright the air,
Eddying, dizzying, closing round,
  With soft and drunken laughter;
Veiling all that may befall
  After—after—

Where Beauty and Beauty met,
  Earth's still a-tremble there,
And winds are scented yet,
  And memory-soft the air,
Bosoming, folding glints of light,
  And shreds of shadowy laughter;
Not the tears that fill the years
  After—after—

HEAVEN

Fish (fly-replete, in depth of June,
Dawdling away their wat'ry noon)
Ponder deep wisdom, dark or clear,
Each secret fishy hope or fear.
Fish say, they have their Stream and Pond;
But is there anything Beyond?
This life cannot be All, they swear,
For how unpleasant, if it were!
One may not doubt that, somehow, Good
Shall come of Water and of Mud;
And, sure, the reverent eye must see
A Purpose in Liquidity.
We darkly know, by Faith we cry,
The future is not Wholly Dry.
Mud unto mud!—Death eddies near—
Not here the appointed End, not here!
But somewhere, beyond Space and Time,
Is wetter water, slimier slime!
And there (they trust) there swimmeth One
Who swam ere rivers were begun,
Immense, of fishy form and mind,
Squamous, omnipotent, and kind;
And under that Almighty Fin,
The littlest fish may enter in.
Oh! never fly conceals a hook,
Fish say, in the Eternal Brook,
But more than mundane weeds are there,
And mud, celestially fair;
Fat caterpillars drift around,
And Paradisal grubs are found;
Unfading moths, immortal flies,
And the worm that never dies.
And in that Heaven of all their wish,
There shall be no more land, say fish.

CLOUDS

Rupert Brooke

Down the blue night the unending columns press
In noiseless tumult, break and wave and flow,
Now tread the far South, or lift rounds of snow
Up to the white moon's hidden loveliness.
Some pause in their grave wandering comradeless,
And turn with profound gesture vague and slow,
As who would pray good for the world, but know
Their benediction empty as they bless.

They say that the Dead die not, but remain
Near to the rich heirs of their grief and mirth.
I think they ride the calm mid-heaven, as these,
In wise majestic melancholy train,
And watch the moon, and the still-raging seas,
And men, coming and going on the earth.

Rupert Brooke

SONNET

(Suggested by some of the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research)

Not with vain tears, when we're beyond the sun,
  We'll beat on the substantial doors, nor tread
  Those dusty high-roads of the aimless dead
Plaintive for Earth; but rather turn and run
Down some close-covered by-way of the air,
  Some low sweet alley between wind and wind,
  Stoop under faint gleams, thread the shadows, find
Some whispering ghost-forgotten nook, and there

Spend in pure converse our eternal day;
  Think each in each, immediately wise;
Learn all we lacked before; hear, know, and say
  What this tumultuous body now denies;
And feel, who have laid our groping hands away;
  And see, no longer blinded by our eyes.

THE SOLDIER

Rupert Brooke

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

WILLIAM H. DAVIES

THUNDERSTORMS

William H. Davies

My mind has thunderstorms,
  That brood for heavy hours:
Until they rain me words,
  My thoughts are drooping flowers
And sulking, silent birds.

Yet come, dark thunderstorms,
  And brood your heavy hours;
For when you rain me words
  My thoughts are dancing flowers
And joyful singing birds.

William
H. Davies

THE MIND'S LIBERTY

The mind, with its own eyes and ears,
  May for these others have no care;
No matter where this body is,
  The mind is free to go elsewhere.
My mind can be a sailor, when
  This body's still confined to land;
And turn these mortals into trees,
  That walk in Fleet Street or the Strand.

So, when I'm passing Charing Cross,
  Where porters work both night and day,
I ofttimes hear sweet Malpas Brook,
  That flows thrice fifty miles away.
And when I'm passing near St Paul's,
  I see, beyond the dome and crowd,
Twm Barlum, that green pap in Gwent,
  With its dark nipple in a cloud.

THE MOON

William H. Davies

Thy beauty haunts me heart and soul,
  Oh thou fair Moon, so close and bright;
Thy beauty makes me like the child
  That cries aloud to own thy light:
The little child that lifts each arm
To press thee to her bosom warm.

Though there are birds that sing this night
  With thy white beams across their throats,
Let my deep silence speak for me
  More than for them their sweetest notes:
Who worships thee till music fails,
Is greater than thy nightingales.

William
H. Davies

WHEN ON A SUMMER'S MORN

When on a summer's morn I wake,
  And open my two eyes,
Out to the clear, born-singing rills
  My bird-like spirit flies,

To hear the Blackbird, Cuckoo, Thrush,
  Or any bird in song;
And common leaves that hum all day,
  Without a throat or tongue.

And when Time strikes the hour for sleep,
  Back in my room alone,
My heart has many a sweet bird's song—
  And one that's all my own.

A GREAT TIME

William H. Davies

Sweet Chance, that led my steps abroad,
  Beyond the town, where wild flowers grow—
A rainbow and a cuckoo, Lord,
  How rich and great the times are now!
    Know, all ye sheep
    And cows, that keep
On staring that I stand so long
  In grass that's wet from heavy rain—
A rainbow and a cuckoo's song
  May never come together again;
    May never come
    This side the tomb.

William
H. Davies

THE HAWK

Thou dost not fly, thou art not perched,
  The air is all around:
What is it that can keep thee set,
  From falling to the ground?
The concentration of thy mind
  Supports thee in the air;
As thou dost watch the small young birds,
  With such a deadly care.

My mind has such a hawk as thou,
  It is an evil mood;
It comes when there's no cause for grief,
  And on my joys doth brood.
Then do I see my life in parts;
  The earth receives my bones,
The common air absorbs my mind—
  It knows not flowers from stones.

SWEET STAY-AT-HOME

William H. Davies

Sweet Stay-at-Home, sweet Well-content,
Thou knowest of no strange continent:
Thou hast not felt thy bosom keep
A gentle motion with the deep;
Thou hast not sailed in Indian seas,
Where scent comes forth in every breeze.
Thou hast not seen the rich grape grow
For miles, as far as eyes can go;
Thou hast not seen a summer's night
When maids could sew by a worm's light;
Nor the North Sea in spring send out
Bright hues that like birds flit about
In solid cages of white ice—
Sweet Stay-at-Home, sweet Love-one-place.
Thou hast not seen black fingers pick
White cotton when the bloom is thick,
Nor heard black throats in harmony;
Nor hast thou sat on stones that lie
Flat on the earth, that once did rise
To hide proud kings from common eyes.
Thou hast not seen plains full of bloom
Where green things had such little room
They pleased the eye like fairer flowers—
Sweet Stay-at-Home, all these long hours.
Sweet Well-content, sweet Love-one-place,
Sweet, simple maid, bless thy dear face;
For thou hast made more homely stuff
Nurture thy gentle self enough;
I love thee for a heart that's kind—
Not for the knowledge in thy mind.

William
H. Davies

A FLEETING PASSION

Thou shalt not laugh, thou shalt not romp,
  Let's grimly kiss with bated breath;
As quietly and solemnly
  As Life when it is kissing Death.
Now in the silence of the grave,
  My hand is squeezing that soft breast;
While thou dost in such passion lie,
  It mocks me with its look of rest.

But when the morning comes at last,
  And we must part, our passions cold,
You'll think of some new feather, scarf
  To buy with my small piece of gold;
And I'll be dreaming of green lanes,
  Where little things with beating hearts
Hold shining eyes between the leaves,
  Till men with horses pass, and carts.

THE BIRD OF PARADISE

William H. Davies

Here comes Kate Summers, who, for gold,
  Takes any man to bed:
"You knew my friend, Nell Barnes," she said;
  "You knew Nell Barnes—she's dead.

"Nell Barnes was bad on all you men,
  Unclean, a thief as well;
Yet all my life I have not found
  A better friend than Nell.

"So I sat at her side at last,
  For hours, till she was dead;
And yet she had no sense at all
  Of any word I said.

"For all her cry but came to this—
  'Not for the world! Take care:
Don't touch that bird of paradise,
  Perched on the bed-post there!'

"I asked her would she like some grapes,
  Some damsons ripe and sweet;
A custard made with new-laid eggs,
  Or tender fowl to eat.

"I promised I would follow her,
  To see her in her grave;
And buy a wreath with borrowed pence,
  If nothing I could save.

"Yet still her cry but came to this—
  'Not for the world! Take care:
Don't touch that bird of paradise,
  Perched on the bed-post there!'"

WALTER DE LA MARE

MUSIC

Walter de la Mare

When music sounds, gone is the earth I know,
And all her lovely things even lovelier grow;
Her flowers in vision flame, her forest trees
Lift burdened branches, stilled with ecstasies.

When music sounds, out of the water rise
Naiads whose beauty dims my waking eyes,
Rapt in strange dream burns each enchanted face,
With solemn echoing stirs their dwelling-place.

When music sounds, all that I was I am
Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came;
And from Time's woods break into distant song
The swift-winged hours, as I hasten along.

Walter de la Mare

WANDERERS

Wide are the meadows of night,
And daisies are shining there,
Tossing their lovely dews,
Lustrous and fair;
And through these sweet fields go,
Wanderers amid the stars—
Venus, Mercury, Uranus, Neptune,
Saturn, Jupiter, Mars.

'Tired in their silver, they move,
And circling, whisper and say,
Fair are the blossoming meads of delight
Through which we stray.

MELMILLO

Walter de la Mare

Three and thirty birds there stood
In an elder in a wood;
Called Melmillo—flew off three,
Leaving thirty in the tree;
Called Melmillo—nine now gone,
And the boughs held twenty-one;
Called Melmillo—and eighteen
Left but three to nod and preen;
Called Melmillo—three—two—one—
Now of birds were feathers none.

Then stole slim Melmillo in
To that wood all dusk and green,
And with lean long palms outspread
Softly a strange dance did tread;
Not a note of music she
Had for echoing company;
All the birds were flown to rest
In the hollow of her breast;
In the wood—thorn, elder, willow—
Danced alone—lone danced Melmillo.

Walter de la Mare

ALEXANDER

It was the Great Alexander,
Capped with a golden helm,
Sate in the ages, in his floating ship,
  In a dead calm.

Voices of sea-maids singing
Wandered across the deep:
The sailors labouring on their oars
  Rowed as in sleep.

All the high pomp of Asia,
Charmed by that siren lay,
Out of their weary and dreaming minds
  Faded away.

Like a bold boy sate their Captain,
His glamour withered and gone,
In the souls of his brooding mariners,
  While the song pined on.

Time like a falling dew,
Life like the scene of a dream
Laid between slumber and slumber
  Only did seem. . . .

O Alexander, then,
In all us mortals too,
Wax not so overbold
  On the wave dark-blue!

Come the calm starry night,
Who then will hear
Aught save the singing
  Of the sea-maids clear?

THE MOCKING FAIRY

Walter de la Mare

'Won't you look out of your window, Mrs Gill?'
Quoth the Fairy, nidding, nodding in the garden;
'*Can't* you look out of your window, Mrs Gill?'
Quoth the Fairy, laughing softly in the garden;
But the air was still, the cherry boughs were still,
And the ivy-tod 'neath the empty sill,
And never from her window looked out Mrs Gill
On the Fairy shrilly mocking in the garden.

'What have they done with you, you poor Mrs Gill?'
Quoth the Fairy brightly glancing in the garden;
'Where have they hidden you, you poor old Mrs Gill?'
Quoth the Fairy dancing lightly in the garden;
But night's faint veil now wrapped the hill,
Stark 'neath the stars stood the dead-still Mill,
And out of her cold cottage never answered Mrs Gill
The Fairy mimbling mambling in the garden.

Walter de la Mare

FULL MOON

One night as Dick lay half asleep,
Into his drowsy eyes
A great still light began to creep
From out the silent skies.
It was the lovely moon's, for when
He raised his dreamy head,
Her surge of silver filled the pane
And streamed across his bed.
So, for awhile, each gazed at each—
Dick and the solemn moon—
Till, climbing slowly on her way,
She vanished, and was gone.

OFF THE GROUND

Walter de la Mare

Three jolly Farmers
Once bet a pound
Each dance the others would
Off the ground.
Out of their coats
They slipped right soon,
And neat and nicesome
Put each his shoon.
One—Two—Three!
And away they go,
Not too fast,
And not too slow;
Out from the elm-tree's
Noonday shadow,
Into the sun
And across the meadow.
Past the schoolroom,
With knees well bent,
Fingers a-flicking,
They dancing went.
Up sides and over,
And round and round,
They crossed click-clacking
The Parish bound;
By Tupman's meadow
They did their mile,
Tee-to-tum
On a three-barred stile.
Then straight through Whipham,
Downhill to Week,
Footing it lightsome,
But not too quick,
Up fields to Watchet,

And on through Wye,
Till seven fine churches
They'd seen skip by—
Seven fine churches,
And five old mills,
Farms in the valley,
And sheep on the hills;
Old Man's Acre
And Dead Man's Pool
All left behind,
As they danced through Wool.
And Wool gone by,
Like tops that seem
To spin in sleep
They danced in dream:
Withy—Wellover—
Wassop—Wo—
Like an old clock
Their heels did go.
A league and a league
And a league they went,
And not one weary,
And not one spent.
And lo, and behold!
Past Willow-cum-Leigh
Stretched with its waters
The great green sea.
Says Farmer Bates,
'I puffs and I blows,
What's under the water,
Why, no man knows!'
Says Farmer Giles,
'My mind comes weak,
And a good man drownded
Is far to seek.'

But Farmer Turvey,
On twirling toes,
Up's with his gaiters,
And in he goes:
Down where the mermaids
Pluck and play
On their twangling harps
In a sea-green day;
Down where the mermaids,
Finned and fair,
Sleek with their combs
Their yellow hair....
Bates and Giles—
On the shingle sat,
Gazing at Turvey's
Floating hat.
But never a ripple
Nor bubble told
Where he was supping
Off plates of gold.
Never an echo
Rilled through the sea
Of the feasting and dancing
And minstrelsy.
They called—called—called:
Came no reply:
Nought but the ripples'
Sandy sigh.
Then glum and silent
They sat instead,
Vacantly brooding
On home and bed,
Till both together
Stood up and said:—
'Us knows not, dreams not,

Walter de la Mare

Where you be,
Turvey, unless
In the deep blue sea;
But axcusing silver—
And it comes most willing—
Here's us two paying
Our forty shilling;
For it's sartin sure, Turvey,
Safe and sound,
You danced us square, Turvey,
Off the ground!'

JOHN DRINKWATER

A TOWN WINDOW

John Drinkwater

Beyond my window in the night
  Is but a drab inglorious street,
Yet there the frost and clean starlight
  As over Warwick woods are sweet.

Under the grey drift of the town
  The crocus works among the mould
As eagerly as those that crown
  The Warwick spring in flame and gold.

And when the tramway down the hill
  Across the cobbles moans and rings,
There is about my window-sill
  The tumult of a thousand wings.

John Drinkwater

OF GREATHAM

(To those who live there)

For peace, than knowledge more desirable,
  Into your Sussex quietness I came,
When summer's green and gold and azure fell
  Over the world in flame.

And peace upon your pasture-lands I found,
  Where grazing flocks drift on continually,
As little clouds that travel with no sound
  Across a windless sky.

Out of your oaks the birds call to their mates
  That brood among the pines, where hidden deep
From curious eyes a world's adventure waits
  In columned choirs of sleep.

Under the calm ascension of the night
  We heard the mellow lapsing and return
Of night-owls purring in their groundling flight
  Through lanes of darkling fern.

Unbroken peace when all the stars were drawn
  Back to their lairs of light, and ranked along
From shire to shire the downs out of the dawn
  Were risen in golden song.

. . . . . .

I sing of peace who have known the large unrest
  Of men bewildered in their travelling,
And I have known the bridal earth unblest
  By the brigades of spring.

I have known that loss. And now the broken
thought
Of nations marketing in death I know,
The very winds to threnodies are wrought
That on your downlands blow.

I sing of peace. Was it but yesterday
I came among your roses and your corn?
Then momently amid this wrath I pray
For yesterday reborn.

John Drinkwater

THE CARVER IN STONE

He was a man with wide and patient eyes,
Grey, like the drift of twitch-fires blown in June,
That, without fearing, searched if any wrong
Might threaten from your heart. Grey eyes he had
Under a brow was drawn because he knew
So many seasons to so many pass
Of upright service, loyal, unabased
Before the world seducing, and so, barren
Of good words praising and thought that mated his.
He carved in stone. Out of his quiet life
He watched as any faithful seaman charged
With tidings of the myriad faring sea,
And thoughts and premonitions through his mind
Sailing as ships from strange and storied lands
His hungry spirit held, till all they were
Found living witness in the chiselled stone.
Slowly out of the dark confusion, spread
By life's innumerable venturings
Over his brain, he would triumph into the light
Of one clear mood, unblemished of the blind
Legions of errant thought that cried about
His rapt seclusion: as a pearl unsoiled,
Nay, rather washed to lonelier chastity,
In gritty mud. And then would come a bird,
A flower, or the wind moving upon a flower,
A beast at pasture, or a clustered fruit,
A peasant face as were the saints of old,
The leer of custom, or the bow of the moon
Swung in miraculous poise—some stray from the world
Of things created by the eternal mind
In joy articulate. And his perfect mood
Would dwell about the token of God's mood,
Until in bird or flower or moving wind

Or flock or shepherd or the troops of heaven
It sprang in one fierce moment of desire
To visible form.
Then would his chisel work among the stone,
Persuading it of petal or of limb
Or starry curve, till risen anew there sang
Shape out of chaos, and again the vision
Of one mind single from the world was pressed
Upon the daily custom of the sky
Or field or the body of man.
His people
Had many gods for worship. The tiger-god,
The owl, the dewlapped bull, the running pard,
The camel, and the lizard of the slime,
The ram with quivering fleece and fluted horn,
The crested eagle and the doming bat
Were sacred. And the king and his high priests
Decreed a temple, wide on columns huge,
Should top the cornlands to the sky's far line.
They bade the carvers carve along the walls
Images of their gods, each one to carve
As he desired, his choice to name his god. . . .
And many came; and he among them, glad
Of three leagues' travel through the singing air
Of dawn among the boughs yet bare of green,
The eager flight of the spring leading his blood
Into swift lofty channels of the air,
Proud as an eagle riding to the sun. . . .
An eagle, clean of pinion—there's his choice.

Daylong they worked under the growing roof,
One at his leopard, one the staring ram,
And he winning his eagle from the stone,
Until each man had carved one image out,
Arow beyond the portal of the house.

John Drinkwater

They stood arow, the company of gods,
Camel and bat, lizard and bull and ram,
The pard and owl, dead figures on the wall,
Figures of habit driven on the stone
By chisels governed by no heat of the brain
But drudges of hands that moved by easy rule.
Proudly recorded mood was none, no thought
Plucked from the dark battalions of the mind
And throned in everlasting sight. But one
God of them all was witness of belief
And large adventure dared. His eagle spread
Wide pinions on a cloudless ground of heaven,
Glad with the heart's high courage of that dawn
Moving upon the ploughlands newly sown,
Dead stone the rest. He looked, and knew it so.

Then came the king with priests and counsellors
And many chosen of the people, wise
With words weary of custom, and eyes askew
That watched their neighbour face for any news
Of the best way of judgment, till, each sure
None would determine with authority,
All spoke in prudent praise. One liked the owl
Because an owl blinked on the beam of his barn.
One, hoarse with crying gospels in the street,
Praised most the ram, because the common folk
Wore breeches made of ram's wool. One declared
The tiger pleased him best,—the man who carved
The tiger-god was halt out of the womb—
A man to praise, being so pitiful.
And one, whose eyes dwelt in a distant void,
With spell and omen pat upon his lips,
And a purse for any crystal prophet ripe,
A zealot of the mist, gazed at the bull—
A lean ill-shapen bull of meagre lines

That scarce the steel had graved upon the stone—
Saying that here was very mystery
And truth, did men but know. And one there was
Who praised his eagle, but remembering
The lither pinion of the swift, the curve
That liked him better of the mirrored swan.
And they who carved the tiger-god and ram,
The camel and the pard, the owl and bull,
And lizard, listened greedily, and made
Humble denial of their worthiness,
And when the king his royal judgment gave
That all had fashioned well, and bade that each
Re-shape his chosen god along the walls
Till all the temple boasted of their skill,
They bowed themselves in token that as this
Never had carvers been so fortunate.

Only the man with wide and patient eyes
Made no denial, neither bowed his head.
Already while they spoke his thoughts had gone
Far from his eagle, leaving it for a sign
Loyally wrought of one deep breath of life,
And played about the image of a toad
That crawled among his ivy leaves. A queer
Puff-bellied toad, with eyes that always stared
Sidelong at heaven and saw no heaven there,
Weak-hammed, and with a throttle somehow twisted
Beyond full wholesome draughts of air, and skin
Of wrinkled lips, the only zest or will
The little flashing tongue searching the leaves.
And king and priest, chosen and counsellor,
Babbling out of their thin and jealous brains,
Seemed strangely one; a queer enormous toad
Panting under giant leaves of dark,
Sunk in the loins, peering into the day.

John Drinkwater

Their judgment wry he counted not for wrong
More than the fabled poison of the toad
Striking at simple wits; how should their thought
Or word in praise or blame come near the peace
That shone in seasonable hours above
The patience of his spirit's husbandry?
They foolish and not seeing, how should he
Spend anger there or fear—great ceremonies
Equal for none save great antagonists?
The grave indifference of his heart before them
Was moved by laughter innocent of hate,
Chastising clean of spite, that moulded them
Into the antic likeness of his toad
Bidding for laughter underneath the leaves.

He bowed not, nor disputed, but he saw
Those ill-created joyless gods, and loathed,
And saw them creeping, creeping round the walls,
Death breeding death, wile witnessing to wile,
And sickened at the dull iniquity
Should be rewarded, and for ever breathe
Contagion on the folk gathered in prayer.
His truth should not be doomed to march among
This falsehood to the ages. He was called,
And he must labour there; if so the king
Would grant it, where the pillars bore the roof
A galleried way of meditation nursed
Secluded time, with wall of ready stone
In panels for the carver set between
The windows—there his chisel should be set,—
It was his plea. And the king spoke of him,
Scorning, as one lack-fettle, among all these
Eager to take the riches of renown;
One fearful of the light or knowing nothing
Of light's dimension, a witling who would throw

Honour aside and praise spoken aloud
All men of heart should covet. Let him go
Grubbing out of the sight of those who knew
The worth of substance; there was his proper trade.

A squat and curious toad indeed. . . . The eyes,
Patient and grey, were dumb as were the lips,
That, fixed and governed, hoarded from them all
The larger laughter lifting in his heart.
Straightway about his gallery he moved,
Measured the windows and the virgin stone,
Till all was weighed and patterned in his brain.
Then first where most the shadows struck the wall,
Under the sills, and centre of the base,
From floor to sill out of the stone was wooed
Memorial folly, as from the chisel leapt
His chastening laughter searching priest and king—
A huge and wrinkled toad, with legs asplay,
And belly loaded, leering with great eyes
Busily fixed upon the void.

All days
His chisel was the first to ring across
The temple's quiet; and at fall of dusk
Passing among the carvers homeward, they
Would speak of him as mad, or weak against
The challenge of the world, and let him go
Lonely, as was his will, under the night
Of stars or cloud or summer's folded sun,
Through crop and wood and pastureland to sleep.
None took the narrow stair as wondering
How did his chisel prosper in the stone,
Unvisited his labour and forgot.
And times when he would lean out of his height
And watch the gods growing along the walls,

John Drinkwater

The row of carvers in their linen coats
Took in his vision a virtue that alone
Carving they had not nor the thing they carved.
Knowing the health that flowed about his close
Imagining, the daily quiet won
From process of his clean and supple craft,
Those carvers there, far on the floor below,
Would haply be transfigured in his thought
Into a gallant company of men
Glad of the strict and loyal reckoning
That proved in the just presence of the brain
Each chisel-stroke. How surely would he prosper
In pleasant talk at easy hours with men
So fashioned if it might be—and his eyes
Would pass again to those dead gods that grew
In spreading evil round the temple walls;
And, one dead pressure made, the carvers moved
Along the wall to mould and mould again
The self-same god, their chisels on the stone
Tapping in dull precision as before,
And he would turn, back to his lonely truth.

He carved apace. And first his people's gods,
About the toad, out of their sterile time,
Under his hand thrilled and were recreate.
The bull, the pard, the camel and the ram,
Tiger and owl and bat—all were the signs
Visibly made body on the stone
Of sightless thought adventuring the host
That is mere spirit; these the bloom achieved
By secret labour in the flowing wood
Of rain and air and wind and continent sun. . . .
His tiger, lithe, immobile in the stone,
A swift destruction for a moment leashed,
Sprang crying from the jealous stealth of men

Opposed in cunning watch, with engines hid
Of torment and calamitous desire.
His leopard, swift on lean and paltry limbs,
Was fear in flight before accusing faith.
His bull, with eyes that often in the dusk
Would lift from the sweet meadow grass to watch
Him homeward passing, bore on massy beam
The burden of the patient of the earth.
His camel bore the burden of the damned,
Being gaunt, with eyes aslant along the nose.
He had a friend, who hammered bronze and iron
And cupped the moonstone on a silver ring,
One constant like himself, would come at night
Or bid him as a guest, when they would make
Their poets touch a starrier height, or search
Together with unparsimonious mind
The crowded harbours of mortality.
And there were jests, wholesome as harvest ale,
Of homely habit, bred of hearts that dared
Judgment of laughter under the eternal eye:
This frolic wisdom was his carven owl.
His ram was lordship on the lonely hills,
Alert and fleet, content only to know
The wind mightily pouring on his fleece,
With yesterday and all unrisen suns
Poorer than disinherited ghosts. His bat
Was ancient envy made a mockery,
Cowering below the newer eagle carved
Above the arches with wide pinion spread,
His faith's dominion of that happy dawn.

And so he wrought the gods upon the wall,
Living and crying out of his desire,
Out of his patient incorruptible thought,
Wrought them in joy was wages to his faith.

John Drinkwater

And other than the gods he made. The stalks
Of bluebells heavy with the news of spring,
The vine loaded with plenty of the year,
And swallows, merely tenderness of thought
Bidding the stone to small and fragile flight;
Leaves, the thin relics of autumnal boughs,
Or massed in June. . . .
All from their native pressure bloomed and sprang
Under his shaping hand into a proud
And governed image of the central man,—
Their moulding, charts of all his travelling.
And all were deftly ordered, duly set
Between the windows, underneath the sills,
And roofward, as a motion rightly planned,
Till on the wall, out of the sullen stone,
A glory blazed, his vision manifest,
His wonder captive. And he was content.

And when the builders and the carvers knew
Their labours done, and high the temple stood
Over the cornlands, king and counsellor
And priest and chosen of the people came
Among a ceremonial multitude
To dedication. And, below the thrones
Where king and archpriest ruled above the throng,
Highest among the ranked artificers
The carvers stood. And when, the temple vowed
To holy use, tribute and choral praise
Given as was ordained, the king looked down
Upon the gathered folk, and bade them see
The comely gods fashioned about the walls,
And keep in honour men whose precious skill
Could so adorn the sessions of their worship,
Gravely the carvers bowed them to the ground.
Only the man with wide and patient eyes

Stood not among them; nor did any come
To count his labour, where he watched alone
Above the coloured throng. He heard, and looked
Again upon his work, and knew it good,
Smiled on his toad, passed down the stair unseen,
And sang across the teeming meadows home.

John
Drinkwater

JAMES ELROY FLECKER

THE OLD SHIPS

James Elroy Flecker

I have seen old ships sail like swans asleep
Beyond the village which men still call Tyre,
With leaden age o'ercargoed, dipping deep
For Famagusta and the hidden sun
That rings black Cyprus with a lake of fire;
And all those ships were certainly so old--
Who knows how oft with squat and noisy gun,
Questing brown slaves or Syrian oranges,
The pirate Genoese
Hell-raked them till they rolled
Blood, water, fruit and corpses up the hold.
But now through friendly seas they softly run,
Painted the mid-sea blue or shore-sea green,
Still patterned with the vine and grapes in gold.

But I have seen
Pointing her shapely shadows from the dawn
And image tumbled on a rose-swept bay
A drowsy ship of some yet older day;
And, wonder's breath indrawn,
Thought I—who knows—who knows—but in that same
(Fished up beyond Aeaea, patched up new
—Stern painted brighter blue—)
That talkative, bald-headed seaman came
(Twelve patient comrades sweating at the oar)
From Troy's doom-crimson shore,
And with great lies about his wooden horse
Set the crew laughing, and forgot his course.

It was so old a ship—who knows, who knows?
—And yet so beautiful, I watched in vain
To see the mast burst open with a rose,
And the whole deck put on its leaves again.

James Elroy Flecker

A FRAGMENT

O pouring westering streams
Shouting that I have leapt the mountain bar,
Down curve on curve my journey's white way gleams—
My road along the river of return.

I know the countries where the white moons burn,
And heavy star on star
Dips on the pale and crystal desert hills.
I know the river of the sun that fills
With founts of gold the lakes of Orient sky.

. . . . . .

And I have heard a voice of broken seas
And from the cliffs a cry.
Ah still they learn, those cave-eared Cyclades,
The Triton's friendly or his fearful horn,
And why the deep sea-bells but seldom chime,
And how those waves and with what spell-swept rhyme
In years of morning, on a summer's morn
Whispering round his castle on the coast,
Lured young Achilles from his haunted sleep
And drave him out to dive beyond those deep
Dim purple windows of the empty swell,
His ivory body flitting like a ghost
Over the holes where flat blind fishes dwell,
All to embrace his mother thronèd in her shell.

SANTORIN

(A Legend of the Aegean)

James Elroy Flecker

'Who are you, Sea Lady,
And where in the seas are we?
I have too long been steering
By the flashes in your eyes.
Why drops the moonlight through my heart,
And why so quietly
Go the great engines of my boat
As if their souls were free?'
'Oh ask me not, bold sailor;
Is not your ship a magic ship
That sails without a sail:
Are not these isles the Isles of Greece
And dust upon the sea?
But answer me three questions
And give me answers three.
What is your ship?' 'A British.'
'And where may Britain be?'
'Oh it lies north, dear lady;
It is a small country.'
'Yet you will know my lover,
Though you live far away:
And you will whisper where he has gone,
That lily boy to look upon
And whiter than the spray.'
'How should I know your lover,
Lady of the sea?'
'Alexander, Alexander,
The King of the World was he.'
'Weep not for him, dear lady,
But come aboard my ship.
So many years ago he died,
He's dead as dead can be.'

James
Elroy
Flecker

'O base and brutal sailor
To lie this lie to me.
His mother was the foam-foot
Star-sparkling Aphrodite;
His father was Adonis
Who lives away in Lebanon,
In stony Lebanon, where blooms
His red anemone.
But where is Alexander,
The soldier Alexander,
My golden love of olden days
The King of the world and me?'

She sank into the moonlight
And the sea was only sea.

YASMIN

A Ghazel

James Elroy Flecker

How splendid in the morning glows the lily: with what grace he throws
His supplication to the rose: do roses nod the head, Yasmin?

But when the silver dove descends I find the little flower of friends
Whose very name that sweetly ends I say when I have said, Yasmin.

The morning light is clear and cold: I dare not in that light behold
A whiter light, a deeper gold, a glory too far shed, Yasmin.

But when the deep red eye of day is level with the lone highway,
And some to Meccah turn to pray, and I toward thy bed, Yasmin;

Or when the wind beneath the moon is drifting like a soul aswoon,
And harping planets talk love's tune with milky wings outspread, Yasmin,

Shower down thy love, O burning bright! For one night or the other night
Will come the Gardener in white, and gathered flowers are dead, Yasmin.

James Elroy Flecker

GATES OF DAMASCUS

Four great gates has the city of Damascus,
And four Grand Wardens, on their spears reclining,
All day long stand like tall stone men
And sleep on the towers when the moon is shining.

This is the song of the East Gate Warden
When he locks the great gate and smokes in his garden.

Postern of Fate, the Desert Gate, Disaster's Cavern, Fort of Fear,
The Portal of Bagdad am I, the Doorway of Diarbekir.

The Persian dawn with new desires may net the flushing mountain spires,
But my gaunt buttress still rejects the suppliance of those mellow fires.

Pass not beneath, O Caravan, or pass not singing. Have you heard
That silence where the birds are dead yet something pipeth like a bird?

Pass not beneath! Men say there blows in stony deserts still a rose
But with no scarlet to her leaf—and from whose heart no perfume flows

Wilt thou bloom red where she buds pale, thy sister rose? Wilt thou not fail
When noonday flashes like a flail? Leave, nightingale, the Caravan!

Pass then, pass all! Bagdad! ye cry, and down the billows of blue sky
Ye beat the bell that beats to hell, and who shall thrust ye back? Not I.

The Sun who flashes through the head and paints the shadows green and red—
The Sun shall eat thy fleshless dead, O Caravan, O Caravan!

And one who licks his lips for thirst with fevered eyes shall face in fear
The palms that wave, the streams that burst, his last mirage, O Caravan!

And one—the bird-voiced Singing-man—shall fall behind thee, Caravan!
And God shall meet him in the night, and he shall sing as best he can.

And one the Bedouin shall slay, and one, sand-stricken on the way,
Go dark and blind; and one shall say—'How lonely is the Caravan!'

Pass out beneath, O Caravan, Doom's Caravan, Death's Caravan!
I had not told ye, fools, so much, save that I heard your Singing-man.

This was sung by the West Gate's keeper
When heaven's hollow dome grew deeper.

I am the gate toward the sea: O sailor men, pass out from me!
I hear you high on Lebanon, singing the marvels of the sea.

James Elroy Flecker

The dragon-green, the luminous, the dark, the serpent-haunted sea,
The snow-besprinkled wine of earth, the white-and-blue-flower foaming sea.

Beyond the sea are towns with towers, carved with lions and lily flowers,
And not a soul in all those lonely streets to while away the hours.

Beyond the towns, an isle where, bound, a naked giant bites the ground:
The shadow of a monstrous wing looms on his back: and still no sound.

Beyond the isle a rock that screams like madmen shouting in their dreams,
From whose dark issues night and day blood crashes in a thousand streams.

Beyond the rock is Restful Bay, where no wind breathes or ripple stirs,
And there on Roman ships, they say, stand rows of metal mariners.

Beyond the bay in utmost West old Solomon the Jewish King
Sits with his beard upon his breast, and grips and guards his magic ring:

And when that ring is stolen, he will rise in outraged majesty,
And take the World upon his back, and fling the World beyond the sea.

This is the song of the North Gate's master,
Who singeth fast, but drinketh faster.

James Elroy Flecker

I am the gay Aleppo Gate: a dawn, a dawn and thou art there:
Eat not thy heart with fear and care, O brother of the beast we hate!

Thou hast not many miles to tread, nor other foes than fleas to dread;
Homs shall behold thy morning meal, and Hama see thee safe in bed.

Take to Aleppo filigrane, and take them paste of apricots,
And coffee tables botched with pearl, and little beaten brassware pots:

And thou shalt sell thy wares for thrice the Damascene retailers' price,
And buy a fat Armenian slave who smelleth odorous and nice.

Some men of noble stock were made: some glory in the murder-blade:
Some praise a Science or an Art, but I like honourable Trade!

Sell them the rotten, buy the ripe! Their heads are weak; their pockets burn.
Aleppo men are mighty fools. Salaam Aleikum! Safe return!

James Elroy Flecker

This is the song of the South Gate Holder,
A silver man, but his song is older.

I am the Gate that fears no fall: the Mihrab of Damascus wall,
The bridge of booming Sinai: the Arch of Allah all in all.

O spiritual pilgrim, rise: the night has grown her single horn:
The voices of the souls unborn are half adream with Paradise.

To Meccah thou hast turned in prayer with aching heart and eyes that burn:
Ah, Hajji, whither wilt thou turn when thou art there, when thou art there?

God be thy guide from camp to camp: God be thy shade from well to well;
God grant beneath the desert stars thou hear the Prophet's camel bell.

And God shall make thy body pure, and give thee knowledge to endure
This ghost-life's piercing phantom-pain, and bring thee out to Life again.

And God shall make thy soul a Glass where eighteen thousand Aeons pass,
And thou shalt see the gleaming Worlds as men see dew upon the grass.

And son of Islam, it may be that thou shalt learn at journey's end
Who walks thy garden eve on eve, and bows his head, and calls thee Friend.

THE DYING PATRIOT

James Elroy Flecker

Day breaks on England down the Kentish hills,
Singing in the silence of the meadow-footing rills,
Day of my dreams, O day!
I saw them march from Dover, long ago,
With a silver cross before them, singing low,
Monks of Rome from their home where the blue seas break in foam,
Augustine with his feet of snow.

Noon strikes on England, noon on Oxford town,
—Beauty she was statue cold—there's blood upon her gown:
Noon of my dreams, O noon!
Proud and godly kings had built her, long ago,
With her towers and tombs and statues all arow,
With her fair and floral air and the love that lingers there,
And the streets where the great men go.

Evening on the olden, the golden sea of Wales,
When the first star shivers and the last wave pales:
O evening dreams!
There's a house that Britons walked in, long ago,
Where now the springs of ocean fall and flow,
And the dead robed in red and sea-lilies overhead
Sway when the long winds blow.

Sleep not, my country: though night is here, afar
Your children of the morning are clamorous for war:
Fire in the night, O dreams!

Though she send you as she sent you, long ago,
South to desert, east to ocean, west to snow,
West of these out to seas colder than the Hebrides
I must go
Where the fleet of stars is anchored, and the young
Star-captains glow.

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

THE GORSE

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

In dream, again within the clean, cold hell
Of glazed and aching silence he was trapped;
And, closing in, the blank walls of his cell
Crushed stifling on him . . . when the bracken snapped,
Caught in his clutching fingers; and he lay
Awake upon his back among the fern,
With free eyes travelling the wide blue day,
Unhindered, unremembering; while a burn
Tinkled and gurgled somewhere out of sight,
Unheard of him; till suddenly aware
Of its cold music, shivering in the light,
He raised himself, and with far-ranging stare
Looked all about him: and with dazed eyes wide
Saw, still as in a numb, unreal dream,
Black figures scouring a far hill-side,
With now and then a sunlit rifle's gleam;
And knew the hunt was hot upon his track:
Yet hardly seemed to mind, somehow, just then . . .
But kept on wondering why they looked so black
On that hot hillside, all those little men
Who scurried round like beetles—twelve, all told . . .
He counted them twice over; and began
A third time reckoning them, but could not hold
His starved wits to the business, while they ran
So brokenly, and always stuck at 'five' . . .
And 'One, two, three, four, five,' a dozen times
He muttered. . . . 'Can you catch a fish alive?'
Sang mocking echoes of old nursery rhymes
Through the strained, tingling hollow of his head.
And now, almost remembering, he was stirred
To pity them; and wondered if they'd fed
Since he had, or if, ever since they'd heard

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

Two nights ago the sudden signal-gun
That raised alarm of his escape, they too
Had fasted in the wilderness, and run
With nothing but the thirsty wind to chew,
And nothing in their bellies but a fill
Of cold peat-water, till their heads were light. . . .

The crackling of a rifle on the hill
Rang in his ears: and stung to headlong flight,
He started to his feet; and through the brake
He plunged in panic, heedless of the sun
That burned his cropped head to a red-hot ache
Still racked with crackling echoes of the gun.

Then suddenly the sun-enkindled fire
Of gorse upon the moor-top caught his eye:
And that gold glow held all his heart's desire,
As, like a witless, flame-bewildered fly,
He blundered towards the league-wide yellow blaze,
And tumbled headlong on the spikes of bloom;
And rising, bruised and bleeding and adaze,
Struggled through clutching spines; the dense, sweet fume
Of nutty, acrid scent like poison stealing
Through his hot blood; the bristling yellow glare
Spiking his eyes with fire, till he went reeling,
Stifled and blinded, on—and did not care
Though he were taken—wandering round and round,
'Jerusalem the Golden' quavering shrill,
Changing his tune to 'Tommy Tiddler's Ground':
Till, just a lost child on that dazzling hill,
Bewildered in a glittering golden maze
Of stinging scented fire, he dropped, quite done,
A shrivelling wisp within a world ablaze
Beneath a blinding sky, one blaze of sun.

Scene: The big tent-stable of a travelling circus. On the ground near the entrance GENTLEMAN JOHN, stableman and general odd-job man, lies smoking beside MERRY ANDREW, the clown. GENTLEMAN JOHN is a little hunched man with a sensitive face and dreamy eyes. MERRY ANDREW, who is resting between the afternoon and evening performances, with his clown's hat lying beside him, wears a crimson wig, and a baggy suit of orange-coloured cotton, patterned with purple cats. His face is chalked dead-white, and painted with a set grin, so that it is impossible to see what manner of man he is. In the background are camels and elephants feeding, dimly visible in the steamy dusk of the tent.

Gentleman John

And then consider camels: only think
Of camels long enough, and you'ld go mad—
With all their humps and lumps; their knobbly knees,
Splay feet, and straddle legs; their sagging necks,
Flat flanks, and scraggy tails, and monstrous teeth.
I've not forgotten the first fiend I met:
'Twas in a lane in Smyrna, just a ditch
Between the shuttered houses, and so narrow
The brute's bulk blocked the road; the huge green stack
Of dewy fodder that it slouched beneath
Brushing the yellow walls on either hand,
And shutting out the strip of burning blue:
And I'd to face that vicious bobbing head
With evil eyes, slack lips, and nightmare teeth,

And duck beneath the snaky, squirming neck,
Pranked with its silly string of bright blue beads,
That seemed to wriggle every way at once,
As though it were a hydra. Allah's beard!
But I was scared, and nearly turned and ran:
I felt that muzzle take me by the scruff,
And heard those murderous teeth crunching my spine,
Before I stooped—though I dodged safely under.
I've always been afraid of ugliness.
I'm such a toad myself, I hate all toads;
And the camel is the ugliest toad of all,
To my mind; and it's just my devil's luck
I've come to this—to be a camel's lackey,
To fetch and carry for original sin,
For sure enough, the camel's old evil incarnate.
Blue beads and amulets to ward off evil!
No eye's more evil than a camel's eye.
The elephant is quite a comely brute,
Compared with Satan camel,—trunk and all,
His floppy ears, and his inconsequent tail.
He's stolid, but at least a gentleman.
It doesn't hurt my pride to valet him,
And bring his shaving-water. He's a lord.
Only the bluest blood that has come down
Through generations from the mastodon
Could carry off that tail with dignity,
That tail and trunk. He cannot look absurd,
For all the monkey tricks you put him through,
Your paper hoops and popguns. He just makes
His masters look ridiculous, when his pomp's
Butchered to make a bumpkin's holiday.
He's dignity itself, and proper pride,
That stands serenely in a circus-world
Of mountebanks and monkeys. He has weight

Behind him: aeons of primeval power
Have shaped that pillared bulk; and he stands sure,
Solid, substantial on the world's foundations.
And he has form, form that's too big a thing
To be called beauty. Once, long since, I thought
To be a poet, and shape words, and mould
A poem like an elephant, huge, sublime,
To front oblivion; and because I failed,
And all my rhymes were gawky, shambling camels,
Or else obscene, blue-buttocked apes, I'm doomed
To lackey it for things such as I've made,
Till one of them crunches my backbone with his teeth,
Or knocks my wind out with a forthright kick
Clean in the midriff, crumpling up in death
The hunched and stunted body that was me—
John, the apostle of the Perfect Form!
Jerusalem! I'm talking like a book—
As you would say: and a bad book at that,
A maundering, kiss-mammy book—The Hunchback's End
Or The Camel-Keeper's Reward—would be its title.
I froth and bubble like a new-broached cask.
No wonder you look glum, for all your grin.
What makes you mope? You've naught to growse about.
You've got no hump. Your body's brave and straight—
So shapely even that you can afford
To trick it in fantastic shapelessness,
Knowing that there's a clean-limbed man beneath
Preposterous pantaloons and purple cats.
I would have been a poet, if I could:
But better than shaping poems 'twould have been

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

To have had a comely body and clean limbs
Obedient to my bidding.

Merry Andrew I missed a hoop
This afternoon.

Gentleman John You missed a hoop? You mean . . .

Merry Andrew
That I am done, used up, scrapped, on the shelf,
Out of the running—only that, no more.

Gentleman John
Well, I've been missing hoops my whole life long;
Though, when I come to think of it, perhaps
There's little consolation to be chewed
From crumbs that I can offer.

Merry Andrew I've not missed
A hoop since I was six. I'm forty-two.
This is the first time that my body's failed me:
But 'twill not be the last. And . . .

Gentleman John Such is life!
You're going to say. You see I've got it pat,
Your jaded wheeze. Lord, what a wit I'ld make
If I'd a set grin painted on my face.
And such is life, I'ld say a hundred times,
And each time set the world aroar afresh
At my original humour. Missed a hoop!
Why, man alive, you've naught to grumble at.
I've boggled every hoop since I was six.
I'm fifty-five; and I've run round a ring
Would make this potty circus seem a pinhole.
I wasn't born to sawdust. I'd the world
For circus . . .

Merry Andrew It's no time for crowing now. Wilfrid
I know a gentleman, and take on trust Wilson
The silver spoon and all. My teeth were cut Gibson
Upon a horseshoe: and I wasn't born
To purple and fine linen—but to sawdust,
To sawdust, as you say—brought up on sawdust.
I've had to make my daily bread of sawdust:
Ay, and my children's,—children's, that's the rub,
As Shakespeare says . . .

Gentleman John Ah, there you go again!
What a rare wit to set the ring aroar—
As Shakespeare says! Crowing? A gentleman?
Man, didn't you say you'd never missed a hoop?
It's only gentlemen who miss no hoops,
Clean livers, easy lords of life who take
Each obstacle at a leap, who never fail.
You are the gentleman.

Merry Andrew Now don't you try
Being funny at my expense; or you'll soon find
I'm not quite done for yet—not quite snuffed out.
There's still a spark of life. You may have words:
But I've a fist will be a match for them.
Words slaver feebly from a broken jaw.
I've always lived straight, as a man must do
In my profession, if he'ld keep in fettle:
But I'm no gentleman, for I fail to see
There's any sport in baiting a poor man
Because he's losing grip at forty-two,
And sees his livelihood slipping from his grasp—
Ay, and his children's bread.

Gentleman John Why, man alive,
Who's baiting you? This winded, broken cur,

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

That limps through life, to bait a bull like you!
You don't want pity, man! The beaten bull,
Even when the dogs are tearing at his gullet,
Turns no eye up for pity. I myself,
Crippled and hunched and twisted as I am,
Would make a brave fend to stand up to you
Until you swallowed your words, if you should slobber
Your pity over me. A bull! Nay, man,
You're nothing but a bear with a sore head.
A bee has stung you—you who've lived on honey.
Sawdust, forsooth! You've had the sweet of life:
You've munched the honeycomb till . . .

Merry Andrew

Ay! talk's cheap.
But you've no children. You don't understand.

Gentleman John

I have no children: I don't understand!

Merry Andrew

It's children make the difference.

Gentleman John

Man alive—
Alive and kicking, though you're shamming dead—
You've hit the truth at last. It's that, just that,
Makes all the difference. If you hadn't children,
I'ld find it in my heart to pity you,
Granted you'ld let me. I don't understand!
I've seen you stripped. I've seen your children stripped.
You've never seen me naked; but you can guess
The misstitched, gnarled, and crooked thing I am.
Now, do you understand? I may have words.

Wilfrid
Wilson
Gibson

But you, man, do you never burn with pride
That you've begotten those six limber bodies,
Firm flesh, and supple sinew, and lithe limb—
Six nimble lads, each like young Absalom,
With red blood running lively in his veins,
Bone of your bone, your very flesh and blood?
It's you don't understand. God, what I'ld give
This moment to be you, just as you are,
Preposterous pantaloons, and purple cats,
And painted leer, and crimson curls, and all—
To be you now, with only one missed hoop,
If I'd six clean-limbed children of my loins,
Born of the ecstasy of life within me,
To keep it quick and valiant in the ring
When I . . . but I . . . Man, man, you've missed a hoop;
But they'll take every hoop like blooded colts:
And 'twill be you in them that leaps through life,
And in their children, and their children's children.
God! doesn't it make you hold your breath to think
There'll always be an Andrew in the ring,
The very spit and image of you stripped,
While life's old circus lasts? And I . . . at least
There is no twisted thing of my begetting
To keep my shame alive: and that's the most
That I've to pride myself upon. But, God,
I'm proud, ay, proud as Lucifer, of that.
Think what it means, with all the urge and sting,
When such a lust of life runs in the veins.
You, with your six sons, and your one missed hoop,
Put that thought in your pipe and smoke it. Well,
And how d'you like the flavour? Something bitter?
And burns the tongue a trifle? That's the brand
That I must smoke while I've the breath to puff.
(*Pause.*)

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

I've always worshipped the body, all my life—
The body, quick with the perfect health which is beauty,
Lively, lissom, alert, and taking its way
Through the world with the easy gait of the early gods.
The only moments I've lived my life to the full
And that live again in remembrance unfaded are those
When I've seen life compact in some perfect body,
The living God made manifest in man:
A diver in the Mediterranean, resting,
With sleeked black hair, and glistening salt-tanned skin,
Gripping the quivering gunwale with tense hands,
His torso lifted out of the peacock sea,
Like Neptune, carved in amber, come to life:
A stark Egyptian on the Nile's edge poised
Like a bronze Osiris against the lush, rank green:
A fisherman dancing reels, on New Year's Eve,
In a hall of shadowy rafters and flickering lights,
At St Abbs on the Berwickshire coast, to the skirl of the pipes,
The lift of the wave in his heels, the sea in his veins:
A Cherokee Indian, as though he were one with his horse,
His coppery shoulders agleam, his feathers aflame
With the last of the sun, descending a gulch in Alaska;
A brawny Cleveland puddler, stripped to the loins,
On the cauldron's brink, stirring the molten iron
In the white-hot glow, a man of white-hot metal:

A Cornish ploughboy driving an easy share
Through the grey, light soil of a headland, against a sea
Of sapphire, gay in his new white corduroys,
Blue-eyed, dark-haired, and whistling a careless tune:
Jack Johnson, stripped for the ring, in his swarthy pride
Of sleek and rippling muscle . . .

Merry Andrew Jack's the boy!
Ay, he's the proper figure of a man.
But he'll grow fat and flabby and scant of breath.
He'll miss his hoop some day.

Gentleman John But what are words
To shape the joy of form? The Greeks did best
To cut in marble or to cast in bronze
Their ecstasy of living. I remember
A marvellous Hermes that I saw in Athens,
Fished from the very bottom of the deep
Where he had lain two thousand years or more,
Wrecked with a galleyful of Roman pirates,
Among the white bones of his plunderers
Whose flesh had fed the fishes as they sank—
Serene in cold, imperishable beauty,
Biding his time, till he should rise again,
Exultant from the wave, for all men's worship,
The morning-spring of life, the youth of the world,
Shaped in sea-coloured bronze for everlasting.
Ay, the Greeks knew: but men have forgotten now.
Not easily do we meet beauty walking
The world to-day in all the body's pride.
That's why I'm here—a stable-boy to camels—

For in the circus-ring there's more delight
Of seemly bodies, goodly in sheer health,
Bodies trained and tuned to the perfect pitch,
Eager, blithe, debonair, from head to heel
Aglow and alive in every pulse, than elsewhere
In this machine-ridden land of grimy, glum
Round-shouldered, coughing mechanics. Once I lived
In London, in a slum called Paradise,
Sickened to see the greasy pavements crawling
With puny flabby babies, thick as maggots.
Poor brats! I'ld soon go mad if I'd to live
In London, with its stunted men and women
But little better to look on than myself.

Yet, there's an island where the men keep fit—
St Kilda's, a stark fastness of high crag:
They must keep fit or famish: their main food
The Solan goose; and it's a chancy job
To swing down a sheer face of slippery granite
And drop a noose over the sentinel bird
Ere he can squawk to rouse the sleeping flock.
They must keep fit—their bodies taut and trim—
To have the nerve: and they're like tempered steel,
Suppled and fined. But even they've grown slacker
Through traffic with the mainland, in these days.
A hundred years ago, the custom held
That none should take a wife till he had stood,
His left heel on the dizziest point of crag,
His right leg and both arms stretched in mid air,
Above the sea: three hundred feet to drop
To death, if he should fail—a Spartan test.
But any man who could have failed, would scarce
Have earned his livelihood or his children's bread
On that bleak rock.

Merry Andrew (*drowsily*)
Ay, children—that's it, children!

Gentleman John
St Kilda's children had a chance, at least,
With none begotten idly of weakling fathers.
A Spartan test for fatherhood! Should they miss
Their hoop, 'twas death, and childless. You have still
Six lives to take unending hoops for you,
And you yourself are not done yet....

Merry Andrew (*more drowsily*) Not yet.
And there's much comfort in the thought of children.
They're bonnie boys enough; and should do well,
If I can but keep going a little while,
A little longer till...

Gentleman John Six strapping sons!
And I have naught but camels.
(*Pause.*)
Yet, I've seen
A vision in this stable that puts to shame
Each ecstasy of mortal flesh and blood
That's been my eyes' delight. I never breathed
A word of it to man or woman yet:
I couldn't whisper it now to you, if you looked
Like any human thing this side of death.
'Twas on the night I stumbled on the circus.
I'd wandered all day, lost among the fells,
Over snow-smothered hills, through blinding blizzard,
Whipped by a wind that seemed to strip and skin me,

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

Till I was one numb ache of sodden ice.
Quite done, and drunk with cold, I'ld soon have dropped
Dead in a ditch; when suddenly a lantern
Dazzled my eyes. I smelt a queer warm smell;
And felt a hot puff in my face; and blundered
Out of the flurry of snow and raking wind
Dizzily into a glowing Arabian night
Of elephants and camels having supper.
I thought that I'd gone mad, stark, staring mad;
But I was much too sleepy to mind just then—
Dropped dead asleep upon a truss of hay;
And lay, a log, till—well, I cannot tell
How long I lay unconscious. I but know
I slept, and wakened, and that 'twas no dream.
I heard a rustle in the hay beside me,
And opening sleepy eyes, scarce marvelling,
I saw her, standing naked in the lamplight,
Beneath the huge tent's cavernous canopy,
Against the throng of elephants and camels
That champed unwondering in the golden dusk,
Moon-white Diana, mettled Artemis—
Her body, quick and tense as her own bowstring,
Her spirit, an arrow barbed and strung for flight—
White snowflakes melting on her night-black hair,
And on her glistening breasts and supple thighs:
Her red lips parted, her keen eyes alive
With fierce, far-ranging hungers of the chase
Over the hills of morn . . . The lantern guttered
And I was left alone in the outer darkness
Among the champing elephants and camels.
And I'll be a camel-keeper to the end:
Though never again my eyes . . .

(*Pause.*)

So you can sleep, Wilfrid
You Merry Andrew, for all you missed your hoop. Wilson
It's just as well, perhaps. Now I can hold Gibson
My secret to the end. Ah, here they come!

(*Six lads, between the ages of three and twelve, clad in pink tights covered with silver spangles, tumble into the tent.*)

The Eldest Boy
Daddy, the bell's rung, and . . .

Gentleman John He's snoozing sound.
(*to the youngest boy*)
You just creep quietly, and take tight hold
Of the crimson curls, and tug, and you will hear
The purple pussies all caterwaul at once.

THE GOING

R. B.

He's gone.
I do not understand.
I only know
That as he turned to go
And waved his hand,
In his young eyes a sudden glory shone,
And I was dazzled with a sunset glow,
And he was gone.

RALPH HODGSON

THE BULL

Ralph Hodgson

See an old unhappy bull,
Sick in soul and body both,
Slouching in the undergrowth
Of the forest beautiful,
Banished from the herd he led,
Bulls and cows a thousand head.

Cranes and gaudy parrots go
Up and down the burning sky;
Tree-top cats purr drowsily
In the dim-day green below;
And troops of monkeys, nutting, some,
All disputing, go and come;

And things abominable sit
Picking offal buck or swine,
On the mess and over it
Burnished flies and beetles shine,
And spiders big as bladders lie
Under hemlocks ten foot high;

And a dotted serpent curled
Round and round and round a tree,
Yellowing its greenery,
Keeps a watch on all the world,
All the world and this old bull
In the forest beautiful.

Bravely by his fall he came:
One he led, a bull of blood
Newly come to lustihood,
Fought and put his prince to shame,
Snuffed and pawed the prostrate head
Tameless even while it bled.

There they left him, every one,
Left him there without a lick,
Left him for the birds to pick,
Left him there for carrion,
Vilely from their bosom cast
Wisdom, worth and love at last.

When the lion left his lair
And roared his beauty through the hills,
And the vultures pecked their quills
And flew into the middle air,
Then this prince no more to reign
Came to life and lived again.

He snuffed the herd in far retreat,
He saw the blood upon the ground,
And snuffed the burning airs around
Still with beevish odours sweet,
While the blood ran down his head
And his mouth ran slaver red.

Pity him, this fallen chief,
All his splendour, all his strength,
All his body's breadth and length
Dwindled down with shame and grief,
Half the bull he was before,
Bones and leather, nothing more.

See him standing dewlap-deep
In the rushes at the lake,
Surly, stupid, half asleep,
Waiting for his heart to break
And the birds to join the flies
Feasting at his bloodshot eyes,—

Standing with his head hung down
In a stupor, dreaming things:
Green savannas, jungles brown,
Battlefields and bellowings,
Bulls undone and lions dead
And vultures flapping overhead.

Dreaming things: of days he spent
With his mother gaunt and lean
In the valley warm and green,
Full of baby wonderment,
Blinking out of silly eyes
At a hundred mysteries;

Dreaming over once again
How he wandered with a throng
Of bulls and cows a thousand strong,
Wandered on from plain to plain,
Up the hill and down the dale,
Always at his mother's tail;

How he lagged behind the herd,
Lagged and tottered, weak of limb,
And she turned and ran to him
Blaring at the loathly bird
Stationed always in the skies,
Waiting for the flesh that dies.

Dreaming maybe of a day
When her drained and drying paps
Turned him to the sweets and saps,
Richer fountains by the way,
And she left the bull she bore
And he looked to her no more;

Ralph Hodgson

And his little frame grew stout,
And his little legs grew strong,
And the way was not so long;
And his little horns came out,
And he played at butting trees
And boulder-stones and tortoises,

Joined a game of knobby skulls
With the youngsters of his year,
All the other little bulls,
Learning both to bruise and bear,
Learning how to stand a shock
Like a little bull of rock.

Dreaming of a day less dim,
Dreaming of a time less far,
When the faint but certain star
Of destiny burned clear for him,
And a fierce and wild unrest
Broke the quiet of his breast,

And the gristles of his youth
Hardened in his comely pow,
And he came to fighting growth,
Beat his bull and won his cow,
And flew his tail and trampled off
Past the tallest, vain enough,

And curved about in splendour full
And curved again and snuffed the airs
As who should say Come out who dares!
And all beheld a bull, a Bull,
And knew that here was surely one
That backed for no bull, fearing none.

And the leader of the herd
Looked and saw, and beat the ground,
And shook the forest with his sound,
Bellowed at the loathly bird
Stationed always in the skies,
Waiting for the flesh that dies.

Dreaming, this old bull forlorn,
Surely dreaming of the hour
When he came to sultan power,
And they owned him master-horn,
Chiefest bull of all among
Bulls and cows a thousand strong.

And in all the tramping herd
Not a bull that barred his way,
Not a cow that said him nay,
Not a bull or cow that erred
In the furnace of his look
Dared a second, worse rebuke;

Not in all the forest wide,
Jungle, thicket, pasture, fen,
Not another dared him then,
Dared him and again defied;
Not a sovereign buck or boar
Came a second time for more.

Not a serpent that survived
Once the terrors of his hoof
Risked a second time reproof,
Came a second time and lived,
Not a serpent in its skin
Came again for discipline;

Ralph Hodgson

Not a leopard bright as flame,
Flashing fingerhooks of steel,
That a wooden tree might feel,
Met his fury once and came
For a second reprimand,
Not a leopard in the land.

Not a lion of them all,
Not a lion of the hills,
Hero of a thousand kills,
Dared a second fight and fall,
Dared that ram terrific twice,
Paid a second time the price. . . .

Pity him, this dupe of dream,
Leader of the herd again
Only in his daft old brain,
Once again the bull supreme
And bull enough to bear the part
Only in his tameless heart.

Pity him that he must wake;
Even now the swarm of flies
Blackening his bloodshot eyes
Bursts and blusters round the lake,
Scattered from the feast half-fed,
By great shadows overhead.

And the dreamer turns away
From his visionary herds
And his splendid yesterday,
Turns to meet the loathly birds
Flocking round him from the skies,
Waiting for the flesh that dies.

THE SONG OF HONOUR

Ralph Hodgson

I climbed a hill as light fell short,
And rooks came home in scramble sort,
And filled the trees and flapped and fought
And sang themselves to sleep;
An owl from nowhere with no sound
Swung by and soon was nowhere found,
I heard him calling half-way round,
Holloing loud and deep;
A pair of stars, faint pins of light,
Then many a star, sailed into sight,
And all the stars, the flower of night,
Were round me at a leap;
To tell how still the valleys lay
I heard a watchdog miles away. . . .
And bells of distant sheep.

I heard no more of bird or bell,
The mastiff in a slumber fell,
I stared into the sky,
As wondering men have always done
Since beauty and the stars were one,
Though none so hard as I.

It seemed, so still the valleys were,
As if the whole world knelt at prayer,
Save me and me alone;
So pure and wide that silence was
I feared to bend a blade of grass,
And there I stood like stone.

There, sharp and sudden, there I heard—
Ah! some wild lovesick singing bird
Woke singing in the trees?

Ralph Hodgson

The nightingale and babble-wren
Were in the English greenwood then,
And you heard one of these ?

The babble-wren and nightingale
Sang in the Abyssinian vale
That season of the year!
Yet, true enough, I heard them plain,
I heard them both again, again,
As sharp and sweet and clear
As if the Abyssinian tree
Had thrust a bough across the sea,
Had thrust a bough across to me
With music for my ear!

I heard them both, and oh! I heard
The song of every singing bird
That sings beneath the sky,
And with the song of lark and wren
The song of mountains, moths and men
And seas and rainbows vie!

I heard the universal choir
The Sons of Light exalt their Sire
With universal song,
Earth's lowliest and loudest notes,
Her million times ten million throats
Exalt Him loud and long,
And lips and lungs and tongues of Grace
From every part and every place
Within the shining of His face,
The universal throng.

I heard the hymn of being sound
From every well of honour found
In human sense and soul:

The song of poets when they write
The testament of Beautysprite
Upon a flying scroll,
The song of painters when they take
A burning brush for Beauty's sake
And limn her features whole—

The song of men divinely wise
Who look and see in starry skies
Not stars so much as robins' eyes,
And when these pale away
Hear flocks of shiny pleiades
Among the plums and apple trees
Sing in the summer day—
The song of all both high and low
To some blest vision true,
The song of beggars when they throw
The crust of pity all men owe
To hungry sparrows in the snow,
Old beggars hungry too—
The song of kings of kingdoms when
They rise above their fortune men,
And crown themselves anew,—

The song of courage, heart and will
And gladness in a fight,
Of men who face a hopeless hill
With sparking and delight,
The bells and bells of song that ring
Round banners of a cause or king
From armies bleeding white—

The song of sailors every one
When monstrous tide and tempest run
At ships like bulls at red,

When stately ships are twirled and spun
Like whipping tops and help there's none
And mighty ships ten thousand ton
Go down like lumps of lead—

And song of fighters stern as they
At odds with fortune night and day,
Crammed up in cities grim and grey
As thick as bees in hives,
Hosannas of a lowly throng
Who sing unconscious of their song,
Whose lips are in their lives—

And song of some at holy war
With spells and ghouls more dread by far
Than deadly seas and cities are,
Or hordes of quarrelling kings—
The song of fighters great and small,
The song of pretty fighters all,
And high heroic things—

The song of lovers—who knows how
Twitched up from place and time
Upon a sigh, a blush, a vow,
A curve or hue of cheek or brow,
Borne up and off from here and now
Into the void sublime!

And crying loves and passions still
In every key from soft to shrill
And numbers never done,
Dog-loyalties to faith and friend,
And loves like Ruth's of old no end,
And intermission none—

And burst on burst for beauty and
For numbers not behind,
From men whose love of motherland
Is like a dog's for one dear hand,
Sole, selfless, boundless, blind—
And song of some with hearts beside
For men and sorrows far and wide,
Who watch the world with pity and pride
And warm to all mankind—

And endless joyous music rise
From children at their play,
And endless soaring lullabies
From happy, happy mothers' eyes,
And answering crows and baby cries,
How many who shall say!
And many a song as wondrous well
With pangs and sweets intolerable
From lonely hearths too gray to tell,
God knows how utter gray!
And song from many a house of care
When pain has forced a footing there
And there's a Darkness on the stair
Will not be turned away—

And song—that song whose singers come
With old kind tales of pity from
The Great Compassion's lips,
That makes the bells of Heaven to peal
Round pillows frosty with the feel
Of Death's cold finger tips—

The song of men all sorts and kinds,
As many tempers, moods and minds
As leaves are on a tree,

As many faiths and castes and creeds,
As many human bloods and breeds
As in the world may be;

The song of each and all who gaze
On Beauty in her naked blaze,
Or see her dimly in a haze,
Or get her light in fitful rays
And tiniest needles even,
The song of all not wholly dark,
Not wholly sunk in stupor stark
Too deep for groping Heaven—

And alleluias sweet and clear
And wild with beauty men mishear,
From choirs of song as near and dear
To Paradise as they,
The everlasting pipe and flute
Of wind and sea and bird and brute,
And lips deaf men imagine mute
In wood and stone and clay;

The music of a lion strong
That shakes a hill a whole night long,
A hill as loud as he,
The twitter of a mouse among
Melodious greenery,
The ruby's and the rainbow's song,
The nightingale's—all three,
The song of life that wells and flows
From every leopard, lark and rose
And everything that gleams or goes
Lack-lustre in the sea.

I heard it all, each, every note
Of every lung and tongue and throat,
Ay, every rhythm and rhyme

Of everything that lives and loves
And upward, ever upward moves
From lowly to sublime!
Earth's multitudinous Sons of Light,
I heard them lift their lyric might
With each and every chanting sprite
That lit the sky that wondrous night
As far as eye could climb!

I heard it all, I heard the whole
Harmonious hymn of being roll
Up through the chapel of my soul
And at the altar die,
And in the awful quiet then
Myself I heard, Amen, Amen,
Amen I heard me cry!
I heard it all, and then although
I caught my flying senses, oh,
A dizzy man was I!
I stood and stared; the sky was lit,
The sky was stars all over it,
I stood, I knew not why,
Without a wish, without a will,
I stood upon that silent hill
And stared into the sky until
My eyes were blind with stars and still
I stared into the sky.

D. H. LAWRENCE

SERVICE OF ALL THE DEAD

D. H. Lawrence

Between the avenues of cypresses,
All in their scarlet cloaks, and surplices
Of linen, go the chaunting choristers,
The priests in gold and black, the villagers.

And all along the path to the cemetery
The round, dark heads of men crowd silently,
And black-scarved faces of women-folk, wistfully
Watch at the banner of death, and the mystery.

And at the foot of a grave a father stands
With sunken head, and forgotten, folded hands;
And at the foot of a grave a woman kneels
With pale shut face, and neither hears nor feels

The coming of the chaunting choristers
Between the avenues of cypresses,
The silence of the many villagers,
The candle-flames beside the surplices.

D. H. Lawrence

MEETING AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

The little pansies by the road have turned
Away their purple faces and their gold,
And evening has taken all the bees from the thyme,
And all the scent is shed away by the cold.

Against the hard and pale blue evening sky
The mountain's new-dropped summer snow is clear
Glistening in steadfast stillness: like transcendent
Clean pain sending on us a chill down here.

Christ on the Cross!—his beautiful young man's body
Has fallen dead upon the nails, and hangs
White and loose at last, with all the pain
Drawn on his mouth, eyes broken at last by his pangs.

And slowly down the mountain road, belated,
A bullock wagon comes; so I am ashamed
To gaze any more at the Christ, whom the mountain
snows
Whitely confront; I wait on the grass, am lamed.

The breath of the bullock stains the hard, chill air,
The band is across its brow, and it scarcely seems
To draw the load, so still and slow it moves,
While the driver on the shaft sits crouched in dreams.

Surely about his sunburnt face is something
That vexes me with wonder. He sits so still
Here among all this silence, crouching forward,
Dreaming and letting the bullock take its will.

I stand aside on the grass to let them go;
—And Christ, I have met his accusing eyes again,

The brown eyes black with misery and hate, that look
Full in my own, and the torment starts again.

D. H. Lawrence

One moment the hate leaps at me standing there,
One moment I see the stillness of agony,
Something frozen in the silence that dare not be
Loosed, one moment the darkness frightens me.

Then among the averted pansies, beneath the high
White peaks of snow, at the foot of the sunken Christ
I stand in a chill of anguish, trying to say
The joy I bought was not too highly priced.

But he has gone, motionless, hating me,
Living as the mountains do, because they are strong,
With a pale, dead Christ on the crucifix of his heart,
And breathing the frozen memory of his wrong.

Still in his nostrils the frozen breath of despair,
And heart like a cross that bears dead agony
Of naked love, clenched in his fists the shame,
And in his belly the smouldering hate of me.

And I, as I stand in the cold, averted flowers,
Feel the shame-wounds in his hands pierce through
my own,
And breathe despair that turns my lungs to stone
And know the dead Christ weighing on my bone.

D. H. Lawrence

CRUELTY AND LOVE

What large, dark hands are those at the window
Lifted, grasping in the yellow light
Which makes its way through the curtain web
At my heart to-night?

Ah, only the leaves! So leave me at rest,
In the west I see a redness come
Over the evening's burning breast—
For now the pain is numb.

The woodbine creeps abroad
Calling low to her lover:
The sunlit flirt who all the day
Has poised above her lips in play
And stolen kisses, shallow and gay
Of dalliance, now has gone away
—She woos the moth with her sweet, low word,
And when above her his broad wings hover
Then her bright breast she will uncover
And yield her honey-drop to her lover.

Into the yellow, evening glow
Saunters a man from the farm below,
Leans, and looks in at the low-built shed
Where hangs the swallow's marriage bed.
The bird lies warm against the wall.
She glances quick her startled eyes
Towards him, then she turns away
Her small head, making warm display
Of red upon the throat. Her terrors sway
Her out of the nest's warm, busy ball,

Whose plaintive cries start up as she flies
In one blue stoop from out the sties
Into the evening's empty hall.

D. H. Lawrence

Oh, water-hen, beside the rushes
Hide your quaint, unfading blushes,
Still your quick tail, and lie as dead,
Till the distance covers his dangerous tread.

The rabbit presses back her ears,
Turns back her liquid, anguished eyes
And crouches low: then with wild spring
Spurts from the terror of the oncoming
To be choked back, the wire ring
Her frantic effort throttling:
Piteous brown ball of quivering fears!

Ah soon in his large, hard hands she dies,
And swings all loose to the swing of his walk.
Yet calm and kindly are his eyes
And ready to open in brown surprise
Should I not answer to his talk
Or should he my tears surmise.

I hear his hand on the latch, and rise from my chair
Watching the door open: he flashes bare
His strong teeth in a smile, and flashes his eyes
In a smile like triumph upon me; then careless-wise
He flings the rabbit soft on the table board
And comes towards me: ah, the uplifted sword
Of his hand against my bosom, and oh, the broad
Blade of his hand that raises my face to applaud
His coming: he raises up my face to him
And caresses my mouth with his fingers, smelling grim

D. H. Lawrence

Of the rabbit's fur! God, I am caught in a snare!
I know not what fine wire is round my throat,
I only know I let him finger there
My pulse of life, letting him nose like a stoat
Who sniffs with joy before he drinks the blood:
And down his mouth comes to my mouth, and down
His dark bright eyes descend like a fiery hood
Upon my mind: his mouth meets mine, and a flood
Of sweet fire sweeps across me, so I drown
Within him, die, and find death good.

FRANCIS LEDWIDGE

THE WIFE OF LLEW

Francis Ledwidge

And Gwydion said to Math, when it was Spring:
" Come now and let us make a wife for Llew."
And so they broke broad boughs yet moist with dew,
And in a shadow made a magic ring:
They took the violet and the meadow-sweet
To form her pretty face, and for her feet
They built a mound of daisies on a wing,
And for her voice they made a linnet sing
In the wide poppy blowing for her mouth.
And over all they chanted twenty hours.
And Llew came singing from the azure south
And bore away his wife of birds and flowers.

Francis Ledwidge

A RAINY DAY IN APRIL

When the clouds shake their hyssops, and the rain
Like holy water falls upon the plain,
'Tis sweet to gaze upon the springing grain
And see your harvest born.

And sweet the little breeze of melody
The blackbird puffs upon the budding tree,
While the wild poppy lights upon the lea
And blazes 'mid the corn.

The skylark soars the freshening shower to hail,
And the meek daisy holds aloft her pail,
And Spring all radiant by the wayside pale
Sets up her rock and reel.

See how she weaves her mantle fold on fold,
Hemming the woods and carpeting the wold.
Her warp is of the green, her woof the gold,
The spinning world her wheel.

THE LOST ONES

Francis Ledwidge

Somewhere is music from the linnets' bills,
And thro' the sunny flowers the bee-wings drone,
And white bells of convolvulus on hills
Of quiet May make silent ringing, blown
Hither and thither by the wind of showers,
And somewhere all the wandering birds have flown;
And the brown breath of Autumn chills the flowers.

But where are all the loves of long ago?
O little twilight ship blown up the tide,
Where are the faces laughing in the glow
Of morning years, the lost ones scattered wide
Give me your hand, O brother, let us go
Crying about the dark for those who died.

JOHN MASEFIELD

THE 'WANDERER.'

All day they loitered by the resting ships,
Telling their beauties over, taking stock;
At night the verdict left my messmates' lips,
'The *Wanderer* is the finest ship in dock.'

I had not seen her, but a friend, since drowned,
Drew her, with painted ports, low, lovely, lean,
Saying, 'The *Wanderer*, clipper, outward bound,
The loveliest ship my eyes have ever seen—

'Perhaps to-morrow you will see her sail.
She sails at sunrise': but the morrow showed
No *Wanderer* setting forth for me to hail;
Far down the stream men pointed where she rode,

Rode the great trackway to the sea, dim, dim,
Already gone before the stars were gone.
I saw her at the sea-line's smoky rim
Grow swiftly vaguer as they towed her on.

Soon even her masts were hidden in the haze
Beyond the city; she was on her course
To trample billows for a hundred days;
That afternoon the norther gathered force,

Blowing a small snow from a point of east.
'Oh, fair for her,' we said, 'to take her south.'
And in our spirits, as the wind increased,
We saw her there, beyond the river mouth,

Setting her side-lights in the wildering dark,
To glint upon mad water, while the gale
Roared like a battle, snapping like a shark,
And drunken seamen struggled with the sail;

John Masefield

While with sick hearts her mates put out of mind
Their little children left astern, ashore,
And the gale's gathering made the darkness blind,
Water and air one intermingled roar.

Then we forgot her, for the fiddlers played,
Dancing and singing held our merry crew;
The old ship moaned a little as she swayed.
It blew all night, oh, bitter hard it blew!

So that at midnight I was called on deck
To keep an anchor-watch: I heard the sea
Roar past in white procession filled with wreck;
Intense bright frosty stars burned over me,

And the Greek brig beside us dipped and dipped,
White to the muzzle like a half-tide rock,
Drowned to the mainmast with the seas she shipped;
Her cable-swivels clanged at every shock.

And like a never-dying force, the wind
Roared till we shouted with it, roared until
Its vast vitality of wrath was thinned,
Had beat its fury breathless and was still.

By dawn the gale had dwindled into flaw,
A glorious morning followed: with my friend
I climbed the fo'c's'le-head to see; we saw
The waters hurrying shorewards without end.

Haze blotted out the river's lowest reach;
Out of the gloom the steamers, passing by,
Called with their sirens, hooting their sea-speech;
Out of the dimness others made reply.

And as we watched there came a rush of feet
Charging the fo'c's'le till the hatchway shook.
Men all about us thrust their way, or beat,
Crying, 'The *Wanderer* ! Down the river! Look!'

I looked with them towards the dimness; there
Gleamed like a spirit striding out of night
A full-rigged ship unutterably fair,
Her masts like trees in winter, frosty-bright.

Foam trembled at her bows like wisps of wool;
She trembled as she towed. I had not dreamed
That work of man could be so beautiful,
In its own presence and in what it seemed.

'So she is putting back again,' I said.
'How white with frost her yards are on the fore!'
One of the men about me answer made,
'That is not frost, but all her sails are tore,

'Torn into tatters, youngster, in the gale;
Her best foul-weather suit gone.' It was true,
Her masts were white with rags of tattered sail
Many as gannets when the fish are due.

Beauty in desolation was her pride,
Her crowned array a glory that had been;
She faltered tow'rds us like a swan that died,
But although ruined she was still a queen.

'Put back with all her sails gone,' went the word;
Then, from her signals flying, rumour ran,
'The sea that stove her boats in killed her third;
She has been gutted and has lost a man.'

John Masefield

So, as though stepping to a funeral march,
She passed defeated homewards whence she came
Ragged with tattered canvas white as starch,
A wild bird that misfortune had made tame.

She was refitted soon: another took
The dead man's office; then the singers hove
Her capstan till the snapping hawsers shook;
Out, with a bubble at her bows, she drove.

Again they towed her seawards, and again
We, watching, praised her beauty, praised her trim,
Saw her fair house-flag flutter at the main,
And slowly saunter seawards, dwindling dim;

And wished her well, and wondered, as she died,
How, when her canvas had been sheeted home,
Her quivering length would sweep into her stride,
Making the greenness milky with her foam.

But when we rose next morning, we discerned
Her beauty once again a shattered thing;
Towing to dock the *Wanderer* returned,
A wounded sea-bird with a broken wing.

A spar was gone, her rigging's disarray
Told of a worse disaster than the last;
Like draggled hair dishevelled hung the stay,
Drooping and beating on the broken mast.

Half-mast upon her flagstaff hung her flag;
Word went among us how the broken spar
Had gored her captain like an angry stag,
And killed her mate a half-day from the bar.

She passed to dock upon the top of flood.
An old man near me shook his head and swore:
'Like a bad woman, she has tasted blood—
There'll be no trusting in her any more.'

We thought it truth, and when we saw her there
Lying in dock, beyond, across the stream,
We would forget that we had called her fair,
We thought her murderess and the past a dream.

And when she sailed again we watched in awe,
Wondering what bloody act her beauty planned,
What evil lurked behind the thing we saw,
What strength was there that thus annulled man's hand,

How next its triumph would compel man's will
Into compliance with external Fate,
How next the powers would use her to work ill
On suffering men; we had not long to wait.

For soon the outcry of derision rose,
'Here comes the *Wanderer*!' the expected cry.
Guessing the cause, our mockings joined with those
Yelled from the shipping as they towed her by.

She passed us close, her seamen paid no heed
To what was called: they stood, a sullen group,
Smoking and spitting, careless of her need,
Mocking the orders given from the poop.

Her mates and boys were working her; we stared.
What was the reason of this strange return,
This third annulling of the thing prepared?
No outward evil could our eyes discern.

JAMES STEPHENS

That soul was there apparent, not revealed;
Unearthly meanings covered every tree;
That wet grass grew in an immortal field;
Those waters fed some never-wrinkled sea.

The scarlet berries in the hedge stood out
Like revelations, but the tongue unknown;
Even in the brooks a joy was quick; the trout
Rushed in a dumbness dumb to me alone.

All of the valley was aloud with brooks;
I walked the morning, breasting up the fells,
Taking again lost childhood from the rooks,
Whose cawing came above the Christmas bells.

I had not walked that glittering world before,
But up the hill a prompting came to me,
'This line of upland runs along the shore:
Beyond the hedgerow I shall see the sea.'

And on the instant from beyond away
That long familiar sound, a ship's bell, broke
The hush below me in the unseen bay.
Old memories came: that inner prompting spoke.

And bright above the hedge a seagull's wings
Flashed and were steady upon empty air.
'A Power unseen,' I cried, 'prepares these things;
'Those are her bells, the *Wanderer* is there.'

So, hurrying to the hedge and looking down,
I saw a mighty bay's wind-crinkled blue
Ruffling the image of a tranquil town,
With lapsing waters glittering as they grew.

And near me in the road the shipping swung,
So stately and so still in such great peace
That like to drooping crests their colours hung,
Only their shadows trembled without cease.

I did but glance upon those anchored ships.
Even as my thought had told, I saw her plain;
Tense, like a supple athlete with lean hips,
Swiftness at pause, the *Wanderer* come again—

Come as of old a queen, untouched by Time,
Resting the beauty that no seas could tire,
Sparkling, as though the midnight's rain were rime,
Like a man's thought transfigured into fire.

And as I looked, one of her men began
To sing some simple tune of Christmas Day;
Among her crew the song spread, man to man,
Until the singing rang across the bay;

And soon in other anchored ships the men
Joined in the singing with clear throats, until
The farm-boy heard it up the windy glen,
Above the noise of sheep-bells on the hill.

Over the water came the lifted song—
Blind pieces in a mighty game we swing;
Life's battle is a conquest for the strong;
The meaning shows in the defeated thing.

HAROLD MONRO

MILK FOR THE CAT.

Harold Monro

When the tea is brought at five o'clock,
And all the neat curtains are drawn with care,
The little black cat with bright green eyes
Is suddenly purring there.

At first she pretends, having nothing to do,
She has come in merely to blink by the grate,
But, though tea may be late or the milk may be sour,
She is never late.

And presently her agate eyes
Take a soft large milky haze,
And her independent casual glance
Becomes a stiff, hard gaze.

Then she stamps her claws or lifts her ears,
Or twists her tail and begins to stir,
Till suddenly all her lithe body becomes
One breathing, trembling purr.

The children eat and wriggle and laugh
The two old ladies stroke their silk:
But the cat is grown small and thin with desire,
Transformed to a creeping lust for milk.

The white saucer like some full moon descends
At last from the clouds of the table above;
She sighs and dreams and thrills and glows,
Transfigured with love.

She nestles over the shining rim,
Buries her chin in the creamy sea;
Her tail hangs loose; each drowsy paw
Is doubled under each bending knee.

Harold Monro

A long, dim ecstasy holds her life;
Her world is an infinite shapeless white,
Till her tongue has curled the last holy drop,
Then she sinks back into the night,

Draws and dips her body to heap
Her sleepy nerves in the great arm-chair,
Lies defeated and buried deep
Three or four hours unconscious there.

OVERHEARD ON A SALTMARSH.

Harold Monro

Nymph, nymph, what are your beads?

Green glass, goblin. Why do you stare at them?

Give them me.

No.

Give them me. Give them me.

No.

Then I will howl all night in the reeds,
Lie in the mud and howl for them.

Goblin, why do you love them so?

They are better than stars or water,
Better than voices of winds that sing,
Better than any man's fair daughter,
Your green glass beads on a silver ring.

Hush, I stole them out of the moon.

Give me your beads, I want them.

No.

I will howl in a deep lagoon
For your green glass beads, I love them so.
Give them me. Give them.

No.

CHILDREN OF LOVE.

The holy boy
Went from his mother out in the cool of the day
Over the sun-parched fields
And in among the olives shining green and shining grey.

There was no sound,
No smallest voice of any shivering stream.
Poor sinless little boy,
He desired to play and to sing; he could only sigh and dream.

Suddenly came
Running along to him naked, with curly hair,
That rogue of the lovely world,
That other beautiful child whom the virgin Venus bare.

The holy boy
Gazed with those sad blue eyes that all men know.
Impudent Cupid stood
Panting, holding an arrow and pointing his bow.

(Will you not play?
Jesus, run to him, run to him, swift for our joy.
Is he not holy, like you?
Are you afraid of his arrows, O beautiful dreaming boy?)

And now they stand
Watching one another with timid gaze;
Youth has met youth in the wood,
But holiness will not change its melancholy ways.

Cupid at last
Draws his bow and softly lets fly a dart.
Smile for a moment, sad world!—
It has grazed the white skin and drawn blood from the sorrowful heart.

Now, for delight,
Cupid tosses his locks and goes wantonly near;
But the child that was born to the cross
Has let fall on his cheek, for the sadness of life, a compassionate tear.

Marvellous dream!
Cupid has offered his arrows for Jesus to try;
He has offered his bow for the game.
But Jesus went weeping away, and left him there wondering why.

Harold Monro

JAMES STEPHENS

THE RIVALS

James Stephens

I heard a bird at dawn
  Singing sweetly on a tree,
That the dew was on the lawn,
  And the wind was on the lea;
But I didn't listen to him,
  For he didn't sing to me.

I didn't listen to him,
  For he didn't sing to me
That the dew was on the lawn
  And the wind was on the lea;
I was singing at the time
  Just as prettily as he.

I was singing all the time,
  Just as prettily as he,
About the dew upon the lawn
  And the wind upon the lea;
So I didn't listen to him
  And he sang upon a tree.

James Stephens

THE GOAT PATHS

The crooked paths go every way
  Upon the hill—they wind about
  Through the heather in and out
Of the quiet sunniness.
And there the goats, day after day,
  Stray in sunny quietness,
Cropping here and cropping there,
  As they pause and turn and pass,
Now a bit of heather spray,
  Now a mouthful of the grass.

In the deeper sunniness,
  In the place where nothing stirs,
Quietly in quietness,
  In the quiet of the furze,
For a time they come and lie
Staring on the roving sky.

If you approach they run away,
  They leap and stare, away they bound,
  With a sudden angry sound,
To the sunny quietude;
  Crouching down where nothing stirs
  In the silence of the furze,
Couching down again to brood
In the sunny solitude.

If I were as wise as they
  I would stray apart and brood,
I would beat a hidden way
Through the quiet heather spray
  To a sunny solitude;

And should you come I'd run away,
I would make an angry sound,
I would stare and turn and bound
To the deeper quietude,
To the place where nothing stirs
In the silence of the furze.

In that airy quietness
I would think as long as they;
Through the quiet sunniness
I would stray away to brood
By a hidden beaten way
In a sunny solitude.

I would think until I found
Something I can never find,
Something lying on the ground,
In the bottom of my mind.

James
Stephens

THE SNARE

To A. E.

I hear a sudden cry of pain!
  There is a rabbit in a snare:
Now I hear the cry again,
  But I cannot tell from where.

But I cannot tell from where
  He is calling out for aid;
Crying on the frightened air,
  Making everything afraid.

Making everything afraid,
  Wrinkling up his little face,
As he cries again for aid;
  And I cannot find the place!

And I cannot find the place
  Where his paw is in the snare:
Little one! Oh, little one!
  I am searching everywhere.

IN WOODS AND MEADOWS

James Stephens

Play to the tender stops, though cheerily:
Gently, my soul, my song: let no one hear:
Sing to thyself alone; thine ecstasy
Rising in silence to the inward ear
That is attuned to silence: do not tell
A friend, a bird, a star, lest they should say—
He danced in woods and meadows all the day,
Waving his arms, and cried as evening fell,
'O, do not come,' and cried, 'O, come, thou queen,
And walk with me unwatched upon the green
Under the sky.'

James Stephens

DEIRDRE

Do not let any woman read this verse;
It is for men, and after them their sons
And their sons' sons.

The time comes when our hearts sink utterly;
When we remember Deirdre and her tale,
And that her lips are dust.

Once she did tread the earth: men took her hand;
They looked into her eyes and said their say,
And she replied to them.

More than a thousand years it is since she
Was beautiful: she trod the waving grass;
She saw the clouds.

A thousand years! The grass is still the same,
The clouds as lovely as they were that time
When Deirdre was alive.

But there has never been a woman born
Who was so beautiful, not one so beautiful
Of all the women born.

Let all men go apart and mourn together;
No man can ever love her; not a man
Can ever be her lover.

No man can bend before her: no man say—
What could one say to her? There are no words
That one could say to her!

Now she is but a story that is told
Beside the fire! No man can ever be
The friend of that poor queen.

LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE

THE END OF THE WORLD

PERSONS

HUFF, the Farmer.
SOLLERS, the Wainwright.
MERRICK, the Smith.
VINE, the Publican.
SHALE, the Labourer.
A DOWSER.
MRS HUFF.
WARP, the Molecatcher
Men and Women of the Village.

ACT I

Scene: A public-house kitchen. HUFF the Farmer and SOLLERS the Wainwright talking; another man, a stranger, sitting silent.

Huff
Ay, you may think we're well off—

Sollers Now for croaks
Old toad! who's trodden on you now?—Go on;
But if you can, croak us a new tune.

Huff Ay,
You think you're well off—and don't grab my words
Before they're spoken—but some folks, I've heard,
Pity us, living quiet in the valley.

Sollers
Well, I suppose 'tis their affair.

Huff Is it?
But what I mean to say,—if they think small

Lascelles Abercrombie

Of us that live in the valley, mayn't it show
That we aren't all so happy as we think?

MERRICK the Smith comes in.

Merrick
Quick, cider! I believe I've swallowed a coal.

Sollers
Good evening. True, the heat's a wonder to-night. [*Smith draws himself cider.*

Huff
Haven't you brought your flute? We've all got room
For music in our minds to-night, I'll swear.
Working all day in the sun do seem to push
The thought out of your brain.

Sollers O, 'tis the sun
Has trodden on you? That's what makes you croak?
Ay, whistle him somewhat: put a tune in his brain;
He'll else croak us out of pleasure with drinking.

Merrick
'Tis quenching, I believe.—A tune? Too hot.
You want a fiddler.

Huff Nay, I want your flute.
I like a piping sound, not scraping o' guts.

Merrick
This is no weather for a man to play
Flutes or music at all that asks him spend

His breath and spittle: you want both yourself
These oven days. Wait till a fiddler comes.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Huff Who ever comes down here?

Sollers There's someone come.
[*Pointing with his pipe to the stranger.*

Merrick
Good evening, mister. Are you a man for tunes?

Stranger
And if I was I'ld give you none to-night.

Merrick
Well, no offence: there's no offence, I hope,
In taking a dummy for a tuneful man.
Is it for can't or won't you are?

Stranger
You wouldn't, if you carried in your mind
What I've been carrying all day.

Sollers What's that?

Stranger
You wait; you'll know about it soon; O yes,
Soon enough it will find you out and rouse you.

Huff
Now ain't that just the way we go down here?
Here in the valley we're like dogs in a yard,
Chained to our kennels and wall'd in all round,
And not a sound of the world jumps over our hills.
And when there comes a passenger among us,

Lascelles Abercrombie

One who has heard what's stirring out beyond,
'Tis a grutchy mumchance fellow in the dismals!

Stranger

News, is it, you want? I could give you news!—
I wonder, did you ever hate to feel
The earth so fine and splendid?

Huff Oh, you're one
Has stood in the brunt of the world's wickedness,
Like me? But listen, and I'll give you a tale
Of wicked things done in this little valley,
Done against me, will surely make you think
The Devil here fetcht up his masterpiece.

Sollers

Ah, but it's hot enough without you talking
Your old hell fire about that pair of sinners.
Leave them alone and drink.

Huff I'll smell them grilling
One of these days.

Merrick But there'll be nought to drink
When that begins! Best keep your skin full now.

Stranger

What do I care for wickedness? Let those
Who've played with dirt, and thought the game was bold,
Make much of it while they can: there's a big thing
Coming down to us, ay, well on its road,
Will make their ploys seem mighty piddling sport.

Huff Lascelles Aber-crombie

This is a fool; or else it's what I think,—
The world now breeds such crowd that they've no room
For well-grown sins: they hatch 'em small as flies.
But you stay here, out of the world awhile,
Here where a man's mind, and a woman's mind,
Can fling out large in wickedness: you'll see
Something monstrous here, something dreadful.

Stranger

I've seen enough of that. Though it was only
Fancying made me see it, it was enough:
I've seen the folk of the world yelling aghast,
Scurrying to hide themselves. I want nought else
Monstrous and dreadful.—

Merrick What had roused 'em so?
Some house afire?

Huff A huzzy flogged to death
For her hard-faced adultery?

Stranger (*too intent to hear them*)
Oh to think of it!
Talk, do, chatter some nonsense, else I'll think:
And then I'm feeling like a grub that crawls
All abroad in a dusty road; and high
Above me, and shaking the ground beneath me, come
Wheels of a thundering wain, right where I'm plodding.

Sollers Queer thinking, that.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Stranger And here's a queerer thing.
I have a sort of lust in me, pushing me still
Into that terrible way of thinking, like
Black men in India lie them down and long
To feel their holy wagon crack their spines.

Merrick
Do you mean beetles? I've driven over scores,
They sprawling on their backs, or standing mazed.
I never knew they liked it.

Sollers He means frogs.
I know what's in his mind. When I was young
My mother would catch us frogs and set them down,
Lapt in a screw of paper, in the ruts,
And carts going by would quash 'em; and I'ld laugh,
And yet be thinking, ' Suppose it was myself
Twisted stiff in huge paper, and wheels
Big as the wall of a barn treading me flat! '

Huff
I know what's in his mind: just madness it is.
He's lookt too hard at his fellows in the world;
Sight of their monstrous hearts, like devils in cages,
Has jolted all the gearing of his wits.
It needs a tough brain, ay, a brain like mine,
To pore on ugly sin and not go mad.

Stranger
Madness! You're not far out.—I came up here
To be alone and quiet in my thoughts,
Alone in my own dreadful mind. The path,

Of red sand trodden hard, went up between
High hedges overgrown of hawthorn blowing
White as clouds; ay it seemed burrowed through
A white sweet-smelling cloud,—I walking there
Small as a hare that runs its tunnelled drove
Thro' the close heather. And beside my feet
Blue greygles drifted gleaming over the grass;
And up I climbed to sunlight green in birches,
And the path turned to daisies among grass
With bonfires of the broom beside, like flame
Of burning straw: and I lookt into your valley.
I could scarce look.
Anger was smarting in my eyes like grit.
O the fine earth and fine all for nothing!
Mazed I walkt, seeing and smelling and hearing:
The meadow lands all shining fearfully gold,—
Cruel as fire the sight of them toucht my mind;
Breathing was all a honey taste of clover
And bean flowers: I would have rather had it
Carrion, or the stink of smouldering brimstone.
And larks aloft, the happy piping fools,
And squealing swifts that slid on hissing wings,
And yellowhammers playing spry in hedges:
I never noted them before; but now—
Yes, I was mad, and crying mad, to see
The earth so fine, fine all for nothing!

Sollers (*spits*)
Pst! yellowhammers! He talks gentry talk.
That's worse than being mad.

Stranger
I tell you, you'll be feeling them to-morn
And hating them to be so wonderful.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Merrick
Let's have some sense. Where do you live?

Stranger Nowhere.
I'm always travelling.

Huff Why, what's your trade?

Stranger A dowser.

Huff You're the man for me!

Stranger Not I.

Huff
Ho, this is better than a fiddler now!
One of those fellows who have nerves so clever
That they can feel the waters of underground
Tingling in their fingers?
You find me a spring in my high grazing-field,
I'll give you what I save in trundling water.

Stranger
I find you water now!—No, but I'll find you
Fire and fear and unbelievable death.

VINE the Publican comes in.

Vine
Are ye all served? Ay, seems so; what's your score?

Merrick Two ciders.

Huff Three.

Sollers And two for me.

Vine (*to Dowser*) And you?

Dowser Naught. I was waiting on you.

Vine Will you drink?

Dowser
Ay! Drink! what else is left for a man to do
Who knows what I know?

Vine Good. What is't you know?
You tell it out and set my trade a-buzzing.

Sollers
He's queer. Give him his mug and ease his tongue.

Vine
I had to swill the pigs: else I'd been here;
But we've the old fashion in this house; you draw,
I keep the score. Well, what's the worry on you?

Sollers Oh he's in love.

Dowser You fleering grinning louts,
I'll give it you now; now have it in your faces!

Sollers Crimini, he's going to fight!

Dowser
You try and fight with the thing that's on my side!

Merrick A ranter!

Lascelles Abercrombie

Huff A boozy one then.

Dowser Open yon door;
'Tis dark enough by now. Open it, you.

Vine
Hold on. Have you got something fierce outside?

Merrick A Russian bear?

Sollers Dowsers can play strange games.

Huff No tricks!

Dowser This is a trick to rouse the world.
[*He opens the door.*
Look out! Between the elms! There's my fierce thing.

Merrick
He means the star with the tail like a feather of fire.

Sollers. Comet, it's called.

Huff Do you mean the comet, mister?

Dowser What do you think of it?

Huff Pretty enough.
But I saw a man loose off a rocket once;
It made more stir and flare of itself; though yon
Does better at steady burning.

Dowser Stir and flare! Lascelles Abercrombie
You'll soon forget your rocket.

Merrick Tell you what
I thought last night, now, going home. Says I,
'Tis just like the look of a tadpole: if I saw
A tadpole silver as a dace that swam
Upside-down towards me through black water,
I'ld see the plain spit of that star and his tail.

Sollers
And how does your thought go?

Dowser It's what I know!—
A tadpole and a rocket!—My dear God,
And I can still laugh out!—What do you think
Your tadpole's made of? What lets your rocket fling
Those streaming sparks across the half of night,
Splashing the burning spray of its haste among
The quiet business of the other stars?
Ay, that's a fiery jet it leaves behind
In such enormous drift! What sort of fire
Is spouted so, spouted and never quenching?—
There is no name for that star's fire: it is
The fire that was before the world was made,
The fire that all the things we live among
Remember being; and whitest fire we know
Is its poor copy in their dreaming trance!

Huff
That would be hell fire.

Dowser Ay, if you like, hell fire,
Hell fire flying through the night! 'Twould be

Lascelles Abercrombie

A thing to blink about, a blast of it
Swept in your face, eh? and a thing to set
The whole stuff of the earth smoking rarely?
Which of you said ' the heat's a wonder to-night'?
You have not done with marvelling. There'll come
A night when all your clothes are a pickle of sweat,
And, for all that, the sweat on your salty skin
Shall dry and crack, in the breathing of a wind
That's like a draught come through an open'd furnace.
The leafage of the trees shall brown and faint,
All sappy growth turning to brittle rubbish
As the near heat of the star strokes the green earth;
And time shall brush the fields as visibly
As a rough hand brushes against the nap
Of gleaming cloth—killing the season's colour,
Each hour charged with the wasting of a year;
And sailors panting on their warping decks
Will watch the sea steam like broth about them.
You'll know what I know then!—That towering star
Hangs like a fiery buzzard in the night
Intent over our earth—Ay, now his journey
Points, straight as a plummet's drop, down to us!

Huff Why, that's the end of the world!

Dowser You've said it now.

Sollers What, soon? In a day or two?

Merrick You can't mean that!

Vine
End of the World! Well now, I never thought

To hear the news of that. If you've the truth
In what you say, likely this is an evening
That we'll be talking over often and often.
' How was it, Sollers? ' I'll say; ' or you, Merrick,
Do you mind clearly how he lookt? '—And then—
' " End of the world " he said, and drank—like that,
Solemn! '—And right he was: he had it all
As sure as I have when my sow's to farrow.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Dowser
Are you making a joke of me? Keep your mind
For tippling while you can.

Vine Was that a joke?
I'm always bad at seeing 'em, even my own.

Dowser
A fool's! 'Twill cheer you when the earth blows up
Like as it were all gunpowder.

Vine You mean
The star will butt his burning head against us?
'Twill knock the world to flinders, I suppose?

Dowser
Ay, or with that wild, monstrous tail of his
Smash down upon the air, and make it bounce
Like water under the flukes of a harpooned whale,
And thrash it to a poisonous fire; and we
And all the life of the world drowned in blazing!

Vine
'Twill be a handsome sight. If my old wife
Were with me now! This would have suited her.
'I do like things to happen!' she would say;
Never shindy enough for her; and now
She's gone, and can't be seeing this!

Dowser You poor fool.
How will it be a sight to you, when your eyes
Are scorcht to little cinders in your head?

Vine
Whether or no, there must be folks outside
Willing to know of this. I'll scatter your news.
[*He goes.*

[*A short pause: then SOLLERS breaks out.*

Sollers
No, no; it wouldn't do for me at all;
Nor for you neither, Merrick? End of the World?
Bogy! A parson's tale or a bairn's!

Merrick That's it.
Your trade's a gift, easy as playing tunes.
But Sollers here and I, we've had to drill
Sinew and muscle into their hard lesson,
Until they work in timber and glowing iron
As kindly as I pick up my pint: your work
Grows in your nature, like plain speech in a child,
But we have learnt to think in a foreign tongue;
And something must come out of all our skill!
We shan't go sliding down as glib as you
Into notions of the End of the World.

Sollers

Give me a tree, you may say, and give me steel,
And I'll put forth my shapely mind; I'll make,
Out of my head like telling a well-known tale,
A wain that goes as comely on the roads
As a ship sailing, the lines of it true as gospel.
Have I learnt that all for nothing?—O no!
End of the World? It wouldn't do at all.
No more making of wains, after I've spent
My time in getting the right skill in my hands?

Dowser

Ay, you begin to feel it now, I think;
But you complain like boys for a game spoilt:
Shaping your carts, forging your iron! But Life,
Life, the mother who lets her children play
So seriously busy, trade and craft,—
Life with her skill of a million years' perfection
To make her heart's delighted glorying
Of sunlight, and of clouds about the moon,
Spring lighting her daffodils, and corn
Ripening gold to ruddy, and giant seas,
And mountains sitting in their purple clothes—
O life I am thinking of, life the wonder,
All blotcht out by a brutal thrust of fire
Like a midge that a clumsy thumb squashes and smears.

Huff

Let me but see the show beginning, though!
You'ld mind me then! O I would like you all
To watch how I should figure, when the star
Brandishes over the whole air its flame
Of thundering fire; and naught but yellow rubbish
Parcht on the perishing ground, and there are tongues

Lascelles Abercrombie

Chapt with thirst, glad to lap stinking ponds,
And pale glaring faces spying about
On the earth withering, terror the only speech!
Look for me then, and see me stand alone
Easy and pleasant in the midst of it all.
Did you not make your merry scoff of me?
Was it your talk, that when yon shameless pair
Threw their wantoning in my face like dirt,
I had no heart against them but to grumble?
You would be saying that, I know! But now,
Now I believe it's time for you to see
My patient heart at last taking its wages.

Sollers

Pull up, man! Screw the brake on your running tongue,
Else it will rattle you down the tumbling way
This fellow's gone.

Merrick And one man's enough
With brain quagged axle-deep in crazy mire.
We won't have you beside him in his puddles,
And calling out with him on the End of the World
To heave you out with a vengeance.

Huff What you want!
Have I not borne enough to make me know
I must be righted sometime?—And what else
Would break the hardy sin in them, which lets
Their souls parade so daring and so tall
Under God's hate and mine? What else could pay
For all my wrong but a blow of blazing anger
Striking down to shiver the earth, and change
Their strutting wickedness to horror and crying?

Merrick
Be quiet, Huff! If you mean to believe
This dowser's stuff, and join him in his bedlam,
By God, you'll have to reckon with my fist.

SHALE comes in. HUFF glares at him speechless, but with wrath evidently working.

Shale
Where's the joker? You, is it? Here's hot news
You've brought us; all the valley's hissing aloud,
And makes as much of you falling into it
As a pail of water would of a glowing coal.

Sollers
Don't you start burbling too, Shale.

Shale That's the word!
Burbling, simmering, ay and bumpy-boiling:
All the women are mobbed together close
Under the witan-trees, and their full minds
Boil like so many pans slung on a fire.
Why, starlings trooping in a copse in fall
Could make no scandal like it.

Merrick What is it, man?

Shale
End of the World! The flying star! End of the World!

Sollers They don't believe it though?

Shale What? the whole place
Has gone just randy over it!

Lascelles Abercrombie

Merrick Hold your noise!

Sollers I shall be daft if this goes on.

Shale Ay, so?
The End of the World's been here? You look as though
You'd startled lately. And there's the virtuous man!
How would End of the World suit our good Huff,
Our old crab-verjuice Huff?

HUFF (*seizing the DOWSER and bringing him up in front of SHALE*)
Look at him there!
This is the man I told you of when you
Were talking small of sin. You made it out,
Did you, a fool's mere nasty game, like dogs
That snuggle in muck, and grin and roll themselves
With snorting pleasure? Ah, but you are wrong.
'Tis something that goes thrusting dreadfully
Its wilful bravery of evil against
The worth and right of goodness in the world:
Ay, do you see how his face still brags at me?
And long it has been, the time he's had to walk
Lording about me with his wickedness.
Do you know what he dared? I had a wife,
A flighty pretty linnet-headed girl,
But mine: he practised on her with his eyes;
He knew of luring glances, and she went
After his calling lust: and all since then
They've lived together, fleering in my face,
Pleased in sight of the windows of my house
With doing wrong, and making my disgrace.

O but wait here with me; wait till your news
Is not to be mistaken, for the way
The earth buckles and singes like hot boards:
You'll surely see how dreadful sin can be
Then, when you mark these two running about,
With raging fear for what they did against me
Buzzing close to their souls, stinging their hearts,
And they like scampering beasts when clegs are fierce,
Or flinging themselves low as the ground to writhe,
Their arms hugging their desperate heads. And then
You'll see what 'tis to be an upright man,
Who keeps a patient anger for his wrongs
Thinking of judgment coming —you will see that
When you mark how my looks hunt these wretches,
And smile upon their groans and posturing anguish.
O watch how calm I'll be, when the blazing air
Judges their wickedness; you watch me then
Looking delighted, like a nobleman
Who sees his horse winning an easy race.

Merrick
You fool, Huff, you believe it now!

Huff You fool,
Merrick, how should I not believe a thing
That calls aloud on my mind and spirit, and they
Answer to it like starving conquering soldiers
Told to break out and loot?

Shale You vile old wasp!

Lascelles Abercrombie

Sollers
We've talkt enough: let's all go home and sleep;
There might be a fiend in the air about us, one
Who pours his will into our minds to see
How we can frighten one another.

Huff A fiend!
Shale will soon have the flapping wings of a fiend,
And flaming wings, beating about his head.
There'll be no air for Shale, very soon now,
But the breathing of a fiend: the star's coming!
The star that breathes a horrible fury of fire
Like glaring fog into the empty night;
And in the gust of its wrath the world will soon
Shrivel and spin like paper in a furnace.
I knew they both would have to pay me at last
With sight of their damned souls for all my wrong!

Shale Somebody stop his gab.

Merrick (*seizing the DOWSER and shaking him*)
Is it the truth?
Is it the truth we're in the way of the star?

Sollers
O let us go home; let us go home and sleep!

A crowd of men and women burst in and shout confusedly.
1. Look out for the star!
2. 'Tis moving, moving.
3. Grows as you stare at it.
4. Bigger than ever.

1. Down it comes with a diving pounce, Lascelles Aber-crombie
As though it had lookt for us and at last found us.
2. O so near and coming so quick!
3. And how the burning hairs of its tail
Do seem surely to quiver for speed.
4. We saw its great tail twitch behind it.
'Tis come so near, so gleaming near.
1. The tail is wagging!
2. Come out and see!
3. The star is wagging its tail and eyeing us--
4. Like a cat huncht to leap on a bird.

Merrick
Out of my way and let me see for myself.

[*They all begin to hustle out:*
HUFF speaks in midst of the turmoil.

Huff
Ay, now begins the just man's reward;
And hatred of the evil thing
Now is to be satisfied.
Wrong ventured out against me and braved:
And I'll be glad to see all breathing pleasure
Burn as foolishly to naught
As a moth in candle flame,
If I but have my will to watch over those
Who injured me bawling hoarse heartless fear.

They are all gone but HUFF, SHALE and the DOWSER.

Shale
As for you, let you and the women make
Your howling scare of this; I'll stand and laugh.
But if it truly were the End of the World,
I'ld be the man to face it out, not you:

Lascelles Aber-crombie
I who have let life go delighted through me,
Not you, who've sulkt away your chance of life
In mumping about being paid for goodness.

[*Going.*

Huff (*after him*)
You wait, you wait!

[*He follows the rest.*

Dowser (*alone*) Naught but a plague of flies!
I cannot do with noises, and light fools
Terrified round me; I must go out and think
Where there is quiet and no one near. O, think!
Life that has done such wonders with its thinking,
And never daunted in imagining;
That has put on the sun and the shining night,
The flowering of the earth and tides of the sea,
And irresistible rage of fate itself,
All these as garments for its spirit's journey—
O now this life, in the brute chance of things,
Murder'd, uselessly murder'd! And naught else
For ever but senseless rounds of hurrying motion
That cannot glory in itself. O no!
I will not think of that; I'll blind my brain
With fancying the splendours of destruction;
When like a burr in the star's fiery mane
The crackling earth is caught and rusht along,
The forests on the mountains blazing so,
That from the rocks of ore beneath them come
White-hot rivers of smelted metal pouring
Across the plains to roar into the sea. . . .

The curtain is lowered for a few moments only.

As before, a little while after. The room is empty when the curtain goes up. SOLLERS runs in and paces about, but stops short when he catches sight of a pot dog on the mantelpiece.

Sollers

The pace it is coming down!—What to do now?—
My brain has stopt: it's like a clock that's fallen
Out of a window and broke all its cogs.—
Where's that old cider, Vine would have us pay
Twopence a glass for? Let's try how it smells:
Old Foxwhelp, and a humming stingo it is!
(*To the pot dog*)
Hullo, you! What are you grinning at?—
I know!
There'll be no score against me for this drink!
O that score! I've drunk it down for a week
With every gulp of cider, and every gulp
Was half the beauty it should have been, the score
So scratcht my swallowing throat, like a wasp in the drink!
And I need never have heeded it!—
Old grinning dog! You've seen me happy here;
And now, all's done! But do you know this too,
That I can break you now, and never called
To pay for you? [*Throwing the dog on the floor.*
I shall be savage soon!
We're leaving all this!—O, and it was so pleasant
Here, in here, of an evening.——Smash!
[*He sweeps a lot of crockery on to the floor.*
It's all no good! Let's make a wreck of it all!
[*Picking up a chair and swinging it.*
Damn me! Now I'm forgetting to drink, and soon

'Twill be too late. Where's there a mug not shivered?

[*He goes to draw himself cider. MERRICK rushes in.*

Merrick

You at the barrels too? Out of the road!

[*He pushes SOLLERS away and spills his mug.*

Sollers

Go and kick out of doors, you black donkey.

Merrick

Let me come at the vessel, will you?

[*They wrestle savagely.*

Sollers Keep off;
I'm the first here. Lap what you've spilt of mine.

Merrick

You with your chiselling and screw-driving,
Your wooden work, you bidding me, the man
Who hammers a meaning into red hot iron?

VINE comes in slowly. He is weeping; the two wrestlers stop and stare at him, as he sits down, and holds his head in his hands, sobbing.

Vine O this is a cruel affair!

Sollers Here's Vine crying!

Vine I've seen the moon.

Merrick The moon? 'Tisn't the moon — Lascelles
That's tumbling on us, but yon raging star. — Aber-
What notion now is clotted in your head? — crombie

Vine
I've seen the moon; it has nigh broke my heart.

Sollers
Not the moon too jumping out of her ways?

Vine
No, no;—but going quietly and shining,
Pushing away a flimsy gentle cloud
That would drift smoky round her, fending it off
With steady rounds of blue and yellow light.
It was not much to see. She was no more
Than a curved bit of silver rind. But I
Never before so noted her—

Sollers What he said,
The dowser!

Merrick Ay, about his yellowhammers.

Sollers
And there's a kind of stifle in the air
Already!

Merrick It seems to me, my breathing goes
All hot down my windpipe, hot as cider
Mulled and steaming travels down my swallow.

Sollers
And a queer racing through my ears of blood.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Merrick
I wonder, is the star come closer still?

Sollers
O, close, I know, and viciously heading down.

Vine
She was so silver! and the sun had left
A kind of tawny red, a dust of fine
Thin light upon the blue where she was lying,—
Just a curled paring of the moon, amid
The faint grey cloud that set the gleaming wheel
Around the tilted slip of shining silver.
O it did seem to me so safe and homely,
The moon quietly going about the earth;
It's a rare place we have to live in, here;
And life is such a comfortable thing——
And what's the sense of it all? Naught but to make
Cruel as may be the slaughtering of it.

[*He breaks down again.*

Sollers It beats my mind!

[*He begins to walk up and down desperately.*

Merrick 'Twas bound to come sometime,
Bound to come, I suppose. 'Tis a poor thing
For us, to fall plumb in the chance of it;
But, now or another time, 'twas bound to be.—
I have been thinking back. When I was a lad
I was delighted with my life: there seemed
Naught but things to enjoy. Say we were bathing:
There'ld be the cool smell of the water, and cool
The splashing under the trees: but I did loathe
The sinking mud slithering round my feet,
And I did love to loathe it so! And then

We'ld troop to kill a wasp's nest; and for sure
I would be stung; and if I liked the dusk
And singing and the game of it all, I loved
The smart of the stings, and fleeing the buzzing furies.
And sometimes I'ld be looking at myself
Making so much of everything; there'ld seem
A part of me speaking about myself:
'You know, this is much more than being happy.
'Tis hunger of some power in you, that lives
On your heart's welcome for all sorts of luck,
But always looks beyond you for its meaning.'
And that's the way the world's kept going on,
I believe now. Misery and delight
Have both had liking welcome from it, both
Have made the world keen to be glad and sorry.
For why? It felt the living power thrive
The more it made everything, good and bad,
Its own belonging, forged to its own affair,—
The living power that would do wonders some day.
I don't know if you take me?

Sollers I do, fine;
I've felt the very thought go through my mind
When I was at my wains; though 'twas a thing
Of such a flight I could not read its colour.—
Why was I like a man sworn to a thing
Working to have my wains in every curve,
Ay, every tenon, right and as they should be?
Not for myself, not even for those wains:
But to keep in me living at its best
The skill that must go forward and shape the world,
Helping it on to make some masterpiece.

Merrick
And never was there aught to come of it!
The world was always looking to use its life
In some great handsome way at last. And now—
We are just fooled. There never was any good
In the world going on or being at all.
The fine things life has plotted to do are worth
A rotten toadstool kickt to flying bits.
End of the World? Ay, and the end of a joke.

Vine Well, Huff's the man for this turn.

Merrick Ay, the good man!
He could but grunt when times were pleasant; now
There's misery enough to make him trumpet.
And yet, by God, he shan't come blowing his horn
Over my misery!
We are just fooled, did I say?—We fooled ourselves,
Looking for worth in what was still to come;
And now there's a stop to our innings. Well, that's fair:
I've been a living man, and might have been
Nothing at all! I've had the world about me,
And felt it as my own concern. What else
Should I be crying for? I've had my turn.
The world may be for the sake of naught at last,
But it has been for my sake: I've had that.
[*He sits again, and broods.*

Sollers
I can't stay here. I must be where my sight
May silence with its business all my thinking—
Though it will be the star plunged down so close
It puffs its flaming vengeance in my face.
[*He goes.*

Vine
I wish there were someone who had done me wrong,
Like Huff with his wife and Shale; I wish there were
Somebody I would like to see go crazed
With staring fright. I'ld have my pleasure then
Of living on into the End of the World.
But there is no one at all for me, no one
Now my poor wife is gone.

Merrick Why, what did she
To harm you?

Vine Didn't she marry me?—It's true
She made it come all right. She died at last.
Besides, it would be wasting wishes on her,
To be in hopes of her weeping at this.
She'ld have her hands on her hips and her tongue jumping
As nimble as a stoat, delighting round
The way the world's to be terrible and tormented.—
Ay, but I'll have a thing to tell her now
When she begins to ask the news! I'll say
'You've misst such a show as never was nor will be,
A roaring great affair of death and ruin;
And I was there—the world smasht to sparkles!'
O, I can see her vext at that!

MERRICK has been sunk in thought during this, but VINE seems to brighten at his notion, and speaks quite cheerfully to HUFF, who now comes in, looking mopish, and sits down.

Vine
We've all been envying you, Huff. You're well off,
You with your goodness and your enemies
Showing you how to relish it with their terror.
When do you mean the gibing is to start?

Huff There's time enough.

Vine O, do they still hold out?
If they should be for spiting you to the last!
You'ld best keep on at them: think out a list
Of frantic things for them to do, when air
Is scorching smother and the sin they did
Frightens their hearts. You'll shout them into fear,
I undertake, if you find breath enough.

Huff
You have the breath. What's all your pester for?
You leave me be.

Vine Why, you're to do for me
What I can't do myself.—And yet it's hard
To make out where Shale hurt you. What's the sum
Of all he did to you? Got you quit of marriage
Without the upset of a funeral.

Huff
Why need you blurt your rambling mind at me?
Let me bide quiet in my thought awhile,
And it's a little while we have for thought.

Merrick
I know your thought. Paddling round and around,

Like a squirrel working in a spinning cage
With his neck stretcht to have his chin poke up,
And silly feet busy and always going;
Paddling round the story of your good life,
Your small good life, and how the decent men
Have jeered at your wry antic.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Huff

My good life!
And what good has my goodness been to me?
You show me that! Somebody show me that!
A caterpillar munching a cabbage-heart,
Always drudging further and further from
The sounds and lights of the world, never abroad
Nor flying free in warmth and air sweet-smelling:
A crawling caterpillar, eating his life
In a deaf dark—that's my gain of goodness!
And it's too late to hatch out now!—
I can but fancy what I might have been;
I scarce know how to sin!—But I believe
A long while back I did come near to it.

Merrick

Well done!—O but I should have guesst all this!

Huff

I was in Droitwich; and the sight of the place
Is where they cook the brine: a long dark shed,
Hot as an oven, full of a grey steam
And ruddy light that leaks out of the furnace;
And stirring the troughs, ladling the brine that boils
As thick as treacle, a double standing row,
Women—boldly talking in wicked jokes
All day long. I went to see 'em. It was
A wonderful rousing sight. Not one of them

Lascelles Abercrombie

Was really wearing clothes: half of a sack
Pinned in an apron was enough for most,
And here and there might be a petticoat;
But nothing in the way of bodices.—
O, they knew words to shame a carter's face!

Merrick

This is the thought you would be quiet in!

Huff

Where else can I be quiet? Now there's an end
Of daring, 'tis the one place my life has made
Where I may try to dare in thought. I mind,
When I stood in the midst of those bare women,
All at once, outburst with a rising buzz,
A mob of flying thoughts was wild in me:
Things I might do swarmed in my brain pell-mell,
Like a heap of flies kickt into humming cloud.
I beat them down; and now I cannot tell
For certain what they were. I can call up
Naught venturesome and darting like their style;
Very tame braveries now!—O Shale's the man
To smile upon the End of the World; 'tis Shale
Has lived the bold stiff fashion, and filled himself
With thinking pride in what a man may do.—
I wish I had seen those women more than once!

Vine

Well, here's an upside down! This is old Huff!
What have you been in your heart all these years?
The man you were or the new man you are?

Huff Just a dead flesh!

Merrick Nay, Huff the good man at least
Was something alive, though snarling like trapt vermin.
But this? What's this for the figure of a man?
'Tis a boy's smutty picture on a wall.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Huff
I was alive, was I? Like a blind bird
That flies and cannot see the flight it takes,
Feeling it with mere rowing of its wings.
But Shale—he's had a stirring sense of what he is.

Shouting outside. Then SOLLERS walks in again, very quiet and steady. He stands in the middle, looking down on the floor.

Vine What do they holla for there?

Sollers The earth.

Merrick The earth?

Sollers The earth's afire.

Huff The earth blazing already?
[*Shouts again.*
O, not so soon as this?

Vine What sort of a fire?

Sollers
The earth has caught the heat of the star, you fool.

Merrick
I know: there's come some dazzle in your eyes
From facing to the star; a lamp would do it.

Lascelles Aber-crombie

Huff
It will be that. Your sight, being so strained,
Is flashing of itself.

Sollers Say what you like.
There's a red flare out of the land beyond
Looking over the hills into our valley.
The thing's begun, ' tis certain. Go and see.

Vine I won't see that. I will stay here.

Sollers Ay, creep
Into your oven. You'll be cooler there.—
O my God, we'll all be coals in an hour!
[*Shouts again.*

Huff
And I have naught to stand in my heart upright,
And vow it made my living time worth more
Than if my time had been death in a grave!

Several persons run in.

The Crowd
1. The river's the place!
2. The only safe place now!
3. Best all charge down to the river!
4. For there's a blaze,
A travelling blaze comes racing along the earth.

Sollers
'Tis true. The air's red-hot above the hills.

The Crowd
1. Ay, but the burning now crests the hill-tops
In quiver of yellow flame.
2. And a great smoke
Waving and tumbling upward.

3. The river now! Lascelles
4. The only place we have, not to be roasted! Abercrombie

Merrick
And what will make us water-rats or otters,
To keep our breath still living through a dive
That lasts until the earth's burnt out? Or how
Would that trick serve, when we stand up to gasp,
And find the star waiting for our plunged heads
To knock them into pummy?

Vine Scarce more dazed
I'ld be with that than now. I shall be bound,
When I'm to give my wife the tale of it all,
To be devising: more of this to-do
My mind won't carry.

Huff O ashamed I am,
Ashamed!—It needn't have been downright feats,
Such as the braving men, the like of Shale,
Do easily, and smile, keeping them up.
If I could look back to one manful hour
Of romping in the face of all my goodness!—

SHALE comes in, dragging Mrs HUFF by the hand.

Shale
Huff! Where's Huff?—Huff, you must take her back!
You'll take her back? She's yours: I give her up.

Merrick Belike here's something bold again.

Mrs Huff (*to SHALE*) Once more,
Listen.

Shale I will not listen. There's no time
For aught but giving you back where you belong;
And that's with you, Huff. Take her.

Huff Here is depth
I cannot see to. Is it your last fling?—
The dolt I am in these things!—What's this way
You've found of living wickedly to the end?

Shale
Scorn as you please, but take her back, man, take her.

Huff
But she's my wife! Take her back now? What for?

Mrs Huff
What for? Have you not known of thieves that throw
Their robbery down, soon as they hear a step
Sounding behind them on the road, and run
A long way off, and pull an honest face?
Ay, see Shale's eyes practising baby-looks!
He never stole, not he!

Shale Don't hear her talk.

Mrs Huff
But he was a talker once! Love was the thing;
And love, he swore, would make the wrong go right,
And Huff was a kind of devil—and that's true——

Huff
What? I've been devilish and never knew?

Mrs Huff
The devil in the world that hates all love.
But Shale said, he'd the love in him would hold
If the world's frame and the fate of men were crackt.

Shale What I said!
Whoever thought the world was going to crack?

Mrs Huff
And now he hears someone move behind him.—
They'll say, perhaps, ' You stole this! '—Down it goes,
Thrown to the dirty road—thrown to Huff!

Shale
Yes, to the owner.

Mrs Huff It was not such brave thieving.
You did not take me from my owner, Shale:
There's an old robber will do that some day,
Not you.

Vine Were you thinking of me then, missis?

Mrs Huff (still to SHALE)
You found me lost in the dirt: I was with Huff.
You lifted me from there; and there again,
Like a frightened urchin, you're for throwing me.

Shale Let it be that! I'm firm
Not to have you about me, when the thing,

Whatever it is, that's standing now behind
The burning of the world, comes out on us.

Huff
The way men cheat! This windle-stalk was he
Would hold a show of spirit for the world
To study while it ruined!—Make what you please
Of your short wrangle here, but leave me out.
I have my thoughts—O far enough from this.
[*Turning away.*

Shale (*seizing him*)
You shall not put me off. I tell you, Huff,
You are to take her back now.

Huff Take her back!
And what has she to do with what I want?

Shale
Isn't she yours? I must be quit of her;
I'll not be in the risk of keeping her.
She's yours!

Huff And what's the good of her now to me?
What's the good of a woman whom I've married?

During this, WARP the molecatcher has come in.

Warp
Shale and Huff at their old pother again!

Merrick The molecatcher!

Sollers Warp, have you travelled far?
Is it through frenzy and ghastly crowds you've come?

Vine
Have you got dreadful things to tell us, Warp?

Warp Why, no.
But seemingly you'ld have had news for me,
If I'd come later. Is Huff to murder Shale,
Or Shale for murdering Huff? One way or 'tother,
'Tis time 'twas settled surely.—Mrs Huff,
They're neither of them worth you: here's your health.
[*Draws and drinks.*

Huff
Where have you been? Are you not new from folk
That throng together in a pelting horror?

Warp
Do you think the whole land hearkens to the flurry
Of an old dog biting at a young dog's throat?

Merrick
No, no! Not their shrill yapping; you've not heard
The world's near to be blasted?

Warp No mutter of it.
I am from walking the whole ground I trap,
And there's no likeness of it, but the moles
I've turned up dead and dried out of three counties.

Sollers
Why, but the fire that's eating the whole earth;
The breath of it is scarlet in the sky!
You must have seen that?

Warp But what's taken you?
You are like boys that go to hunt for ghosts,
And turn the scuttle of rats to a roused demon
Crawling to shut the door of the barn they search.
Fire? Yes, fire is playing a pretty game
Yonder, and has its golden fun to itself,
Seemingly.

Sollers You don't know what 'tis that burns?

Warp
Call me a mole and not a molecatcher
If I do not. It is a rick that burns;
And a strange thing I'll count it if the rick
Be not old Huff's.

Sollers That flare a fired stack?

Huff
Only one of my ricks alight? O Glory!
There may be chance for me yet.

Merrick Best take the train
To Droitwich, Huff.

Vine (*at the door*) It would be like a stack,
But for the star.

Sollers (*to WARP*) Yes, as you're so clever,
You can talk down maybe yon brandishing star!

Warp

O, 'tis the star has flickt your brains? Indeed,
The tail swings long enough to-night for that.
Well, look your best at it; 'tis off again
To go its rounds, they tell me, from now on;
And the next time it swaggers in our sky,
The moles a long while will have tired themselves
Of having their easy joke with me.

[*A pause.*

Merrick

You mean
The flight of the star is from us?

Sollers

But the world,
The whole world reckons on it battering us!

Warp

Who told you that?

Sollers

A dowser.

Merrick

Where's he gone?

Warp

A dowser! say a tramping conjurer.
You'll believe aught, if you believe a dowser.

Sollers

I had it in me to be doubting him.

Merrick

The noise you made was like that! But I knew
You'ld laugh at me, so sure you were the world
Would shiver like a bursting grindlestone:
Else I'ld have said out loud, 'twas a fool's whimsy.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Vine
Where are you now? What am I now to think?
Your minds run round in puzzles, like chased hares.
I cannot sight them.

Merrick Think of going to bed.

Sollers And dreaming prices for your pigs.

Merrick O Warp,
You should have seen Vine crying! The moon, he said,
The silver moon! Just like an onion 'twas
To stir the water in his eyes.

Sollers He's left
A puddle of his tears where he was droopt
Over the table.

Vine There's to be no ruin?—
But what's the word of a molecatcher, to crow
So ringing over a dowser's word?

Warp I'll tell you.
These dowsers live on lies: my trade's the truth.
I can read moles, and the way they've dug their journeys,
Where you'ld not see a wrinkle.

Vine And he knows
The buried water.

Warp There's always buried water,
If you prod deep enough. A dowser finds

Because the whole earth's floating, like a raft. Lascelles Abercrombie
What does he know? A twitching in his thews;
A dog asleep knows that much. What I know
I've learnt, and if I'd learnt it wrong, I'ld starve.
And if I'm right about the grubbing moles,
Won't I be right for news of walking men?

Merrick
Of course you're right. Let's put the whole thing by,
And have a pleasant drink.

Shale (*to Mrs HUFF*) You must be tired
With all this story. Shall we be off for home?

Huff
You brass! You don't go now with her! She's mine:
You gave her up.

Shale And you made nothing of her.

(*To Mrs Huff*) Come on.

Mrs Huff Warp, will you do a thing for me?

Warp A hundred things.

Mrs Huff Then slap me these cur-dogs.

Warp
I will. Where will I slap them, and which first?

Mrs Huff
Maybe 'twill do if you but laugh at them.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Warp
I'll try for that; but they are not good jokes;
Though there's a kind of monkey-look about them.

Mrs Huff
They thinking I'ld be near one or the other
After this night! Will I be made no more
Than clay that children puddle to their minds,
Moulding it what they fancy?—Shale was brave:
He made a bogy and defied it, till
He frightened of his work and ran away.
But Huff!—Huff was for modelling wickedly.

Huff Who told you that?

Mrs Huff I need no one's telling.
I was your wife once. Don't I know your goodness?
A stupid heart gone sour with jealousy,
To feel its blood too dull and thick for sinning.—
Yes, Huff would figure a wicked thought, but had
No notion how, and flung the clay aside.—
O they were gaudy colours both! But now
Fear has bleacht their swagger and left them blank,
Fear of a loon that cried, End of the World!

Huff Shale, do you know what we're to do?

Shale I'ld like
To have the handling of that dowser-man.

Huff Just that, my lad, just that!

Warp And your fired rick?

Huff Lascelles Abercrombie

Let it be blazes! Quick, Shale, after him!
I'll tramp the night out, but I'll take the rogue.

Shale (to the others)

You wait, and see us haul him by the ears,
And swim the blatherer in Huff's farm-yard pond.

[*As HUFF and SHALE go out, they see the comet before them.*

Huff The devil's own star is that!

Shale

And floats as calm
As a pike basking.

Huff There shouldn't be such stars!

Shale

Neither such dowsers, and we'll learn him that.
[*They go off together.*

Sollers Why, the star's dwindling now, surely!

Merrick O, small
And dull now to the glowing size it was.

Vine

But is it certain there'll be nothing smasht?
Not even a house knockt roaring down in crumbles?
——And I did think, I'ld open my wife's mouth
With envy of the dreadful things I'd seen!

CURTAIN.

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